"A Polish soldier fights for the freedom of all nations, but dies only for Poland."
/GEN STANISŁAW MACZEK/

SPECIAL EDITION

POLISH HEROES

HISTORIA POLSKA ZBROJNA

ORLEN

ABOUT FUELS, ENERGY, TRENDS AND INNOVATIONS

READ ON THE PKN ORLEN'S MAIN ECONOMIST BLOG
Adam Czyżewski

www.ffbk.orlen.com

PGZ
POLSKA GRUPA ZBROJENIOWA

CONTENTS

INDEPENDENCE AFTER 123 YEARS OF PARTITIONS 6
Wincenty Wierzejewski • Leon Napiecek • Robert Oszek • Bolesław Mościcki • Wiktor Pniewski • Jurek Bitschan and Antoś Petrykiewicz • Józef Unrug • Władysław Belina-Prażmowski

DEFENDING POLAND, DEFENDING EUROPE 30
Teresa Grodzińska • Jan Kowalewski • Ignacy Skorupka • Kornel Krzeczunowicz • Filip Śmiłowski • Bolesław Zajączkowski • Michał Piwoszczuk • Włodzimierz Augustyn

THE BEGINNING OF THE BLOODIEST WAR IN HISTORY 54
Władysław Raginis • Edmund Roman Orlik • Ignacy Matuszewski • Edward Godlewski • Stefan Karaszewski • Jan Grudziński • Józef Maroszek • Henryk Dobrzański • Rudolf Gundlach

THE POLISH UNDERGROUND STATE 80
Antoni Godlewski • Witold Pilecki • Michał Kasza • Jan Wawrzyczek • Jan Piwnik • Henryk Cybulski • Jan Karski • Antoni Szacki

FAR FROM HOME, THEY FOUGHT FOR POLAND 108
Kazimierz Gurbiel • Witold Urbanowicz • Józef Kosacki • Kazimierz Leski • Marian Rejewski • Stanisław Skalski • Krystyna Skarbek • Ludwik Zwolański

THE WAR WAS OVER, BUT THE FIGHT CONTINUED 132
Danuta Siedzik • Kazimierz Moczarski • Zygmunt Szendzielarz • Hieronim Dekutowski • Zdzisław Badocha • Maciej Kalenkiewicz • Józef Franczak • Marian Bernaciak

ALLIES IN NATO 153
Filip Marciniak • Ryszard Kukliński • GROM • Tomasz Borowski • Szymon Sitarczuk • Grzegorz Kaliciak • Rafał Gan-Ganowicz

WOJSKOWY INSTYTUT WYDAWNICZY
WOJSKOWY INSTYTUT WYDAWNICZY / MILITARY PUBLISHING INSTITUTE
Aleje Jerozolimskie 97, 00–909 Warszawa
DIRECTOR OF MILITARY PUBLISHING INSTITUTE Maciej Podczaski
PHONE +48 261 845 365, sekretariat@zbrojni.pl

HISTORIA POLSKA ZBROJNA
POLSKA ZBROJNA. HISTORIA
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF Anna Putkiewicz, pzhistoria@zbrojni.pl
SUPERVISING EDITOR Maciej Chilczuk
TEXT AUTHORS: Maciej Chilczuk, Ewa Korsak, Piotr Korczyński, Anna Putkiewicz, Robert Sendek, Łukasz Zalesiński
TRANSLATION FROM POLISH: Tomasz Ociński, Dorota Aszoff
PROOFREADING: Dorota Aszoff
GRAPHIC DESIGN: Marcin Dmowski, Marcin Izdebski, Paweł Kępka
COVER DESIGN: Paweł Kępka
PHOTO ARCHIVE RESEARCH Aleksander Szycht, Andrzej Witkowski
ILLUSTRATIONS Rafał Roskowiński

AUTHOR OF HISTORICAL RECONSTRUCTION PHOTOS: Cezary Pomykało
Photo Shoot Models: Historical Group "Niepodległość 1863," Historical Group Association "Zgrupowanie Radosław," Historical-Educational Group "Szare Szeregi", Film and Reconstruction Group "Bemowo," Association of Historical Reconstruction of the Polish Armed Forces in the West.
Archive images and photos: Institute of National Remembrance (IPN), National Digital Archives (NAC), Military Publishing Institute (WIW), Military Historical Bureau (WBH), authors' own collections, public domains.

NAC PARTNER National Digital Archives (NAC). 170,000 photos online at www.nac.gov.pl

MARKETING AND PROMOTION: Piotr Zarzycki (manager), Patryk Czarnowski, Agnieszka Karaczun, Anita Kwaterowska (translator), Małgorzata Szustkowska, Marta Szulc
phone +48 261 845 387, reklama@zbrojni.pl
PRINT: ARTDRUK, ul. Napoleona 2, 05-230 Kobyłka, www.artdruk.com

www.polska-zbrojna.pl

PHOTO CEZARY POMYKAŁO

THE HISTORY OF POLAND, IS THE STORY OF A FREE MAN

Anna Putkiewicz
Editor-in-Chief
Polska Zbrojna. Historia Quarterly

When you go to a military cemetery in almost any place in the world, it is likely that you will find graves of people with unpronounceable names and the inscription: "The Polish Armed Forces." Have you ever wondered why they were buried so far from home? It is because a Polish soldier fights for the freedom of all nations – but dies only for Poland.

The truth is that we have always had to fight. War movies, blockbuster hits with the most unimaginable and dramatic scripts, which keep audiences all over the world nailed to their seats, seem to us like flashbacks from our own dreams, like flipping through pages of family diaries. We have been through everything – our land was a target of wars, or lay in their path. It was burned and looted, and we kept rebuilding cities, fertilizing the Polish soil, and planting gardens time and time again. We showed our sons how to fight, as history – life's best teacher – taught us that we can never sleep soundly. It also taught us that alliances may in fact exist only on paper, debts can remain unpaid, and deceit and empty words had been effcient political tools for ages. We made mistakes, believing that friends cannot be sold for political honey.

Polish borders were often burning, but when the sky over our land turned dark with flocks of ravens, when times got really hard, we always took a deep breath and rose to our feet once again. In the face of death, our soldiers did not call for their mother, but shouted the name of their Motherland. Our history is the history of a once powerful kingdom, whose army, led by kings and outstanding commanders, defeated great armies attacking us from the East and from the West. The remembrance of that gives us wings; it is something we cherish. Gratefulness is also important. Freedom, however, is – and always has been – our priority.

When a young American pilot, Merian Cooper, came to Poland for the first time, the battles for Lviv were at their peak. It was 1919, and Cooper knew that brave Poland was rising after over one hundred years of captivity. He admired the nation of people who gritted their teeth again and again and fought relentlessly for their borders. His heart had always been close to Poland – his great-great-grandfather fought side by side with a legendary Polish General Kazimierz Pułaski. He recruited his colleagues, outstanding American pilots, and soon a new squadron, named after Polish and American hero Tadeusz Kościuszko, was flying in the Polish sky. Recruitment points were flooded by volunteers – such was the birth of the Polish Army, which in 1920, though young and only just taking shape, managed to stop the in their march to conquer Europe and the world. The hearts of those who fought with us shoulder to shoulder often stayed in Poland, calling them to return here.

Have you heard of a grand underground army, which throughout the five years of WWII, hunted like an animal, fought with the Germans and later Soviet Russia? Polish forests were green with trees and uniforms, which the then self-appointed "rulers of the world" – first Gestapo, and later NKVD – were afraid to enter. Today, we call these soldiers "steadfast" or "enduring." We are still looking for their graves. Their life stories, told in this publication, will help you look at us and our country from a different perspective. Perhaps they will also help you to better understand Poland and us, the Poles?

The Home Army was a phenomenon on a global scale. The heart of free Poland beat inside it. This army held their "God, Honor, Fatherland" banners up high. Some say honor is impractical, that it is more practical to choose shame instead of war. They are probably right, since happy and practical nations do not need heroes. It was practical to save your life by sending the Jews off to be persecuted by the Germans from under your door. However, thousands of Polish families did not think "practical" at the time. The two-year-old Maria stood straight, holding her pregnant mother's dress, next to her father, her brothers and sisters, and two Jewish men who found shelter in their home. The German firing squad aimed well. Not one person from Wiktoria and Józef Ulm's eight-person family was left alive. Although the Germans punished all who were hiding the Jewish people by death, there were thousands of similar families. Did you know that?

Before Alfred Hitchcock became the director of now legendary thrillers, he made documentaries. In 1945, he worked on documentary footage filmed at freshly liberated German concentration camps. The American and British soldiers who entered the camps with cameras were shocked by the immensity of atrocities that the German nation seduced by nazism perpetrated against millions of helpless victims. Was there any chance to reduce the scale of that crime? We will never know, but the Poles were the only ones who tried to stop the holocaust. A Polish officer, Witold Pilecki, named among six of the bravest war heroes in the world, volunteered to be taken into the Auschwitz concentration camp (one of the death factories created by the Germans on the territory of occupied Poland) in order to prepare maps and a report as a prisoner. He later managed to escape from the place which was impossible to escape. The report was submitted to leaders of Allied powers by another Polish officer, Jan Karski, who risked his life to take it across strictly guarded borders and show it to governments of western powers. The report, however, was thrown deep into a drawer – night fell upon the world, and Pilecki was finished off by communists.

Have you heard about a migrating Polish army of shadows, which, decimated by death, marched from the gulag camps of Siberia, through Asia and the countries of German-occupied Europe, to continue fighting, shoulder to shoulder with the Allies, as the Polish II Corps, "For Our Freedom and Yours," to liberate cities of Italy, France and the Netherlands? Polish soldiers were exhausted, weary, but still adamant – American General George S. Patton, Jr., who was at the time visiting the Polish II Corps, described them as "the best looking troops, including the British and American, that I've ever seen." Have you ever wondered why your military cemeteries became eternal homes to people with unpronounceable names, and the inscription: "The Polish Armed Forces" on their tombs?

"Fight relentlessly, yet chivalrously!" ordered Polish General, Stanisław Maczek, who led the 1st Polish Armored Division to strike the final blow to the German 7th Army near Falaise. Whenever you see a Polish uniform, remember – it is still the same army. Because the history of Poland is the story of a free man.

1 INDEPENDENCE AFTER 123 YEARS OF PARTITIONS

PGZ
POLSKA GRUPA ZBROJENIOWA

ILL. RAFAŁ ROSKOWIŃSKI

7 INDEPENDENCE AFTER 123 YEARS OF PARTITIONS

Each nation taking part in WWI, the "Great War," had clearly defined goals to achieve. Russia wanted to extend its influence into the Balkans, and Germany planned to expand out-side of Europe. France was doing its best to stop Germany's attempts, while Great Britain strove to maintain the position of the world's biggest superpower. Despite soldiers' sacrifice and enor-mous financial cost of the war, very few of those plans were finalized. Surprisingly, a country that was not even on the map of Europe in 1914 turned out to be the most successful after the war. For the Poles, the outbreak of WWI was a chance to re-gain their long-lost indepen-dence. They had been waiting for 123 years, but they still needed to fight hard and long to finally fulfill their dream of free Poland.

The end of the 18th century was a dark period in Polish history. The country was in deepening political and economic crisis, and fell prey to its three neighbors. Russia, Prussia and Austria signed a treaty upon which they divided the territory of Poland between themselves. Poland disappeared from the map of Europe and the invaders agreed to do anything to make sure it would never recover again as an independent state. The Polish nation fought numerous fights to regain their stolen freedom, but unfortunately none of the uprisings turned out to be successful. Regardless, the dream and desire for Polish freedom still burned.

INVADERS BECOME ENEMIES

A failed agreement between the invaders was a chance for Poland. Political tensions within Europe had steadily been rising since the end of the 19th century and the Poles were hop-ing this would finally change their fate as a nation. It seemed to be coming to fruition with the appearance of the Triple Alliance (a secret agreement between the German Empire, Austria-Hungary, and Italy), and its counter-weight, the Triple Entente (an alliance between Great Britain, France and Russia). The new understandings were a clear sign that the original agreement between Russia, Prussia, and Austria was coming to an end.

The outbreak of the Great War in July 1914 meant that the Poles had to decide which side to support. Some Polish politicians placed their support with Russia. Others wanted to support Austria and the Central Powers (consisting of Germany, Austria--Hungary, the Ottoman Empire and Bulgaria). In the end, the Poles simply wanted to reinstate an independent Polish state.

During the first two years of the war, it be-came clear that neither the Russians nor the Austrians would guarantee an independent Polish state. Regardless of the debate on who to support, Polish men were recruited into opposing armies, often facing each other on the battlefield. These armies would often convince Polish recruits to join under the false pretense of fighting for a future Polish state, which was an unfortunate lie.

THE STONE THAT TRIGGERED AN AVALANCHE

The lengthening conflict, financial strain, and high numbers of casualties, forced the Central Powers to change their stance on the Polish state and make an offer. In 1916, the leadership of Germany and Austria-Hungary announced that if the Poles supported them during the war, they would allow the creation of the Kingdom of Poland. The Poles were very skeptical about the proposal – after all, they did not want a poor substitute, but a real, fully independent state. The offer soon proved to be the stone that triggered an avalanche. Western Allies were concerned that the Poles might support

the Central Powers and pressured Russia to clearly state its position. In December 1916, Russian Tsar Nicolas II stated that restoration of the Polish state was one of Russia's goals in the Great War. Additionally, the Russian Provisional Government later declared they recognized Poland's right to self-determination. In January 1917, US President Woodrow Wilson briefed the US Senate explaining the Polish nation had to be restored. In June of the same year, the French Government agreed to the creation of Polish legions, called the Blue Army due to the color of their uniforms. The Poles' dream was slowly coming true. The subject of Polish independence made a strong presence in the realm of international politics and was no longer an internal matter between Russia, Prussia, and Austria.

POLAND RETURNS TO THE MAP OF EUROPE

The Great War ended on November 11, 1918. November 11 is celebrated as a symbolic moment of regaining independence by Poland. The day is only symbolic because the reinstated country did not suddenly appear on the map; Poland's borders would be marked out in the weeks and months to come. The victors did announce that their consent to restore Poland would be one of the conditions of the Central Powers' capitulation, but Poland's western and southern borders were to be agreed upon at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919. Poland's eastern border was an even greater issue. The , who took over power in Russia after the October Revolution in 1917, had already signed a peace treaty with Germany and withdrew from the Great War. The treaty did not mention anything about Poland. The Poles would have to negotiate their eastern border with the Russians themselves.

Poland needed a skilled, intelligent representative fighting for fair Polish boundaries during the Paris Peace Conference. Józef Piłsudski, a battle-hardened hero who fought on all fronts of the war, and became the leader of the newly formed Polish state, selected Ignacy Paderewski to represent Poland. Paderewski was a world-famous pianist, an intellectual, and a patriot. Using his well-known personal status, Paderewski collected funds to help victims of the war and establish the Polish Armed Forces, and supported the idea of including Polish independence in the agreement with the Central Powers. Paderewski accepted Piłsudski's proposal to become the Prime Minister of the Polish government, and returned to Poland in December 1918.

As soon as Paderewski arrived in Poland, he met with his compatriots from Wielkopolska, a western province of Poland and the cradle of Polish statehood. Since the partitions of the 18th century, Wielkopolska belonged to Prussia, and after WWI it became a trouble spot, because both states claimed the region. Paderewski stopped there on his way to Warsaw to highlight its relation to Poland and support pro-Polish organizations before the upcoming peace conference.

Citizens of Poznań, the regional capital of Wielkopolska, were very enthusiastic when Paderewski arrived. Crowds in the streets proudly presented white and red flags, shouting "Long live Poland!" and "Viva anti-German coalition!" That was too much for the Germans, who organized a counter-demonstration and tried to show that Wielkopolska is a German territory and should stay under German rule. Riots broke out. Both sides knew that whoever lost in the streets of Poznań might lose control of the whole territory. The riots in the city quickly turned into an

The young, recently restored Polish state waged a war with enormous Bolshevik Russia.

THE GREAT WAR ENDED ON NOVEMBER 11, 1918. NOVEMBER 11 IS CELEBRATED AS A SYMBOLIC MOMENT OF REGAINING INDEPENDENCE BY POLAND.

open, armed conflict, known as the Wielkopolska Uprising. Fighting lasted until February 1919. The Poles were aware morale was very low in the recently defeated German army and exploited it. They quickly gained military advantage of the front and seized most of the province. Two months later, the parties began talks, a demarcation line was established, and armistice conditions were included in the general treaty of November 11, 1918 between the Central Powers and the Western Allies. These conditions were to be approved at the Paris Peace Conference.

FIRE ON THE BORDERS

The Wielkopolska Uprising had not finished yet when a conflict in the east broke out. Large areas situated between Poland and Bolshevik Russia were still controlled by the defeated Germans. Fortunately, German administration and armed forces were slowly leaving those territories. The conflict in Eastern Poland required ultimate resolution. On February 14, 1919, the first armed clash occurred in the war that would not only decide on the existence of Poland, but would also stop the march of the communist revolution to the West. The future of Europe as a whole was hanging by a thread. The bloody conflict ended in October 1920 (more details in Chapter 2).

The young, recently restored Polish state waged a war with enormous Bolshevik Russia. Even though its final result was very uncertain at that time, the situation in other regions could not wait. Upper Silesia, an industrial area in Southern Poland, rich in natural resources, was another region to which both Poland and Germany claimed rights. For both states the possession of this area was of key importance in the process of overcoming the post-war crisis. In Paris it was decided that the future of Upper Silesia would be determined by means of a plebiscite.

The Poles, being afraid of German manipulations during the plebiscite, took up arms demanding a fair conduct of the voting. Fights lasted until May 1921 and only the Third Silesian Uprising brought positive results. The Poles managed to gain control over most of the region and Polish leaders made a truce with the Germans. International arbitration decided on the borders between Poland and Germany, and in this case, the solutions were in favor of Poland.

Simultaneously, Poland was fighting Lithuania in the north. Both Poland and Lithuania were tied by a political union from the 15th to the 18th century, so border areas were inhabited by both nations. They became a hotbed for conflict. In August 1919, a pro-Polish uprising broke out, and a year later fights for Vilnius, Lithuania's biggest city, began. Poland was victorious in both. Slowly, borders of the restored state started to emerge.

The end of WWI and the favor of the victorious powers slightly opened the door to independence, but the Poles still had to fight for a fully autonomous state.

PGZ
POLSKA GRUPA ZBROJENIOWA

POLISH SCOUTS' TRICK

Wincenty Wierzejewski

In his work entitled "The Art of War," a famous Chinese military strategist Sun Tzu wrote:

"To subdue the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill." Such an exceptional ability was once demonstrated by Wincenty Wierzejewski, who led a company of boy scouts during the Wielkopolska Uprising and seized a fortified citadel manned by German soldiers without firing a single shot. What really helped him achieve the goal was the fact that the Germans were more than unwilling to... do the cleaning.

Wincenty Wierzejewski

ONE OF THE GREATEST CHALLENGES OF URBAN FIGHTING is to capture strongly manned local garrisons. This was also true in Poznań during the first days of the Wielkopolska Uprising that began in December 1918 in the west of Poland. In order to take full control of the city, insurgents had to seize Fort Grolman, a part of the Poznań Fortress.

THIS TASK WAS ASSIGNED TO WINCENTY WIERZEJEWSKI'S COMPANY OF SCOUTS. Wierzejewski knew storming a fortress with light infantry and no artillery support would be a blood-bath. He decided to stake everything on one card. He marched in front of his troops right to the gate and firmly demanded a meeting with the commander. When he arrived, Wierzejewski informed the German commander he had been ordered to take the fort and relieve its crew. As he explained, the fort was to be emptied in order to prepare it for German army units coming to Poznań. The German officer was skeptical at first, as Wierzejewski did not have any evidence confirming this, but his confidence was overwhelming.

THE GERMAN GARRISON WAS NOT EAGER TO FIGHT, nor did it want to leave the barracks. The situation reached a stalemate and Wierzejewski came up with another brilliant idea. His men told the Germans that the last 20 remaining in Fort Grolman would have to clean it before they left. As Wierzejewski remembered years later: "Once they heard that, the commander lost control over his people; they immediately left the barracks."

THE POLISH TROOPS EVEN TOOK CARE OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE PART OF THE SHOW. They established a special body that issued papers allowing German soldiers to travel home. Everything went smoothly. The Germans lined up and waited for their papers to be issued. Once they received them, they said the traditional "Auf Wiedersehen" (German for "See you") to the new crew, but were then instructed not to return to Poland. Next time, the insurgents warned, it might not be so easy and peaceful.

WIERZEJEWSKI'S TRICK WAS 100% SUCCESSFUL. The strong fortress was captured with no loses. The Poles disarmed the German troops and gained significant quantities of rifles, machine guns, ammunition and vehicles. All the equipment was later used in the uprising. The fort itself became a base for the scouts unit, which was soon turned into a real military unit – the 1st Wielkopolska Rifle Regiment.

PGZ
POLSKA GRUPA ZBROJENIOWA

Leon
Napiecek

The fight was over and the **Ehrhardt M17** armored vehicle was seized, repainted, and served the Polish forces.

A POLISH INSURGENT'S KEEN SIGHT

GRENADES FLEW TOWARDS THE VEHICLE.

A GERMAN EHRHARDT M17 armored vehicle advanced towards Polish positions as bullets bounced off its armor. It turned, drove off the road, and stopped. That was the moment Leon Napiecek and his men were waiting for, and they hurled grenades towards the vehicle.

LIKE MANY OTHER POLES who lived in the territories under German control, Leon Napiecek was forced to serve in the German Army and fought on the western front until the end of WWI. In December 1918, he received leave and returned to his home in the Wielkopolska region of Poland. As soon as he learned the Wielkopolska Uprising broke out, he got rid of his German uniform and fought for the annexation of this region to Poland.

IN FEBRUARY 1919, Napiecek and 15 of his men were ordered to stop a German patrol. They hid along the road and waited in silence. The German patrol was heading straight towards the ambush line, but Napiecek's men soon realized that the fight would not be as easy as they had thought. The Germans had an Ehrhardt M17 armored vehicle with three machine guns and a crew of nine. The vehicle reached speeds of up to 60 km/h and its armor effectively protected the crew against small arms fire. For the lightly armed Poles it was a deadly threat.

THE ONLY EFFECTIVE WEAPON Napiecek and his men had was grenades, but the vehicle had to get extremely close to their positions for the grenades to reach it. If the panzer monster was not eliminated quickly, its machine guns would shred Napiecek's force. In agony, the men laid in wait until Napiecek's order.

ONCE THE PATROL WAS WITHIN GRENADE RANGE, Napiecek initiated fire and the Poles engaged the vehicle. German infantrymen ran for cover and the Ehrhardt charged the ambush line. The Poles were pressed to the ground as machinegun fire cracked overhead, unable to throw grenades or return fire. One more minute, and our partisans would be defeated. Suddenly, the vehicle turned, slipped off the road into a ditch, and stopped. That was the moment they were waiting for! Grenades flew towards the vehicle. The Ehrhardt was an easy target and its crew quickly retreated, along with the rest of the German troops. The Poles were victorious. After the battle they found out why. Incredibly, one of the bullets fired by them passed through a narrow view-finder in the driver's compartment and struck the Ehrhardt's driver in the head, thus causing the vehicle to stop.

THE BATTLE WAS WON, and the Ehrhardt was a great prize. After a short repair, the vehicle was repainted and deployed to fight across Wielkopolska. It later served in the Polish Armed Forces for several more years, including service on the Polish-Bolshevik front and during the 3rd Silesian Uprising.

Robert Oszek

The Silesians are known for their persistence. Robert Oszek was no exception to that rule.

CAPTAIN OSZEK'S "ROAD CRUISER"

Polish Armored Car Crew

HE WAS SO DESPERATE to become a sailor that he left home when he was 15 and signed on a German whaler. When years later he was assigned to a military unit in Upper Silesia, around 300 miles from the sea shore, he announced he would not fight on foot. He kept his word and organized a party of "road cruisers."

WHEN HE GRADUATED FROM THE NAVAL ACADEMY IN MÜRWIK near Flensburg, Germany, he was assigned to the SMS Bremen cruiser. At the end of World War I he commanded a motor torpedo boat, and in January 1919, after having returned to Poland, he immediately joined the Polish Navy. After the vetting, as an ensign, he started his service in a war harbor in Toruń. From 1920 onward, he served in the Pinsk Flotilla, in whose ranks he fought during the Polish-Bolshevik War.

IN FEBRUARY 1921, Oszek was promoted to navy lieutenant and went on leave. To his surprise, when he returned from leave he was assigned to land forces. As a Silesian, he was sent to Upper Silesia, at that time preparing for a plebiscite (a vote by all members of an electorate on an important public decision) on whether the region should remain German or be returned to Poland. If the Germans ended up retaining the region, the Poles were sure to conduct another uprising. Oszek did not want to kiss his navy uniform goodbye, and during a staff meeting, he said: "I, a navy officer, will not fight on foot!"

THE GERMANS WON THE VOTE. On February 27, 1921, Lt Oszek reported to the Plebiscite Defense Command in Sosnowiec. He brought some colleagues who were sailors from the Pinsk Flotilla and refreshed his contacts with Polish veterans from the Naval Academy. In early May, Oszek created an independent assault unit ready to fight in the 3rd Silesian Uprising. It consisted of more than 60 seamen who proudly wore their navy uniforms. The unit observed navy customs and discipline and Oszek kept his promise that they would not fight as infantry, but have "a deck under their feet." The unit had several trucks, three of which were immediately turned into armored vehicles and went under the direct command of the Supreme Headquarters of the Uprising Forces. Due to their mobility and fire power, during the fights they took on the role of a mobile reserve.

THE SAILORS CALLED THEIR UP-ARMORED TRUCKS "ROAD CRUISERS". These vehicles gave the Poles a tactical advantage and often aided in Polish victory over German troops in skirmishes. In May and June 1921, Polish and German forces fought a bloody battle for St. Anne Mountain. Lt Oszek had several close calls with death. On one occasion, Oszek was scanning the terrain through a pair of binoculars when a bullet struck them. Luckily, the bullet ricocheted and hit him on the side. Slivers of the binocular lens wounded his face, but he was spared his life. During another operation he was wounded in the hand. Regardless of his wounds, never once did he agree to be sent to the rear. After all, Oszek was a navy man, and as navy men always say, the captain leaves the deck last. After the uprising, he was awarded the Virtuti Militari and was promoted to the rank of captain. When he retired, he became the manager of a tobacco store in Katowice and enjoyed the rest of his days smoking his pipe.

THE SAILORS CALLED THEIR UP-ARMORED TRUCKS "ROAD CRUISERS".

PGZ
POLSKA GRUPA ZBROJENIOWA

HE DEFEATED INVADERS IN ONE DAY

Bolesław Mościcki

At the end of the 18th century, three neighboring countries – Russia, Austria and Prussia – partitioned Poland. As a result, an independent Polish state ceased to exist for the next 123 years.

IN JULY 1917, A CAVALRY REGIMENT COMMANDED BY COL BOLESŁAW MOŚCICKI took a symbolic revenge – in one day they defeated troops of all the three partitioners. First, they fought off Russian Cossacks, then repelled the attack of the Germans and the Austrians.

IN JULY 1917, THE BORDERLAND TOWN OF STANISŁAWÓW was terrorized and looted by marauders remaining from the Russian Army, which almost completely fell apart after the February Revolution and suffering multiple defeats on the front. Luckily for the dwellers of Stanisławów, one of the few Russian units that resisted the revolutionary campaign was stationed in the nearby village of Krechowce. It was a regiment of Uhlans (Polish light cavalry) commanded by an experienced cavalryman, Col Bolesław Mościcki. Mościcki was a veteran of the Russo-Japanese War and participated in a number of WWI campaigns. He listened to the requests of the mayor of Stanisławów and promised him to liberate the town from drunk Cossacks. The colonel and his staff stayed in the town center and tasked each of the four squadrons to clear one quarter of the town. The Uhlans "ran with sabers and lances to defend the lives and possessions of their compatriots" – as it was later put down in the regiment's chronicle. Before the morning of July 24, 1917, their initial clearing operation was over; but they soon understood that it was not the end, but only the beginning of the fight.

BEFORE THE LAST COSSACKS MANAGED TO ESCAPE ACROSS THE NEARBY BYSTRZYCA RIVER, first artillery shells began falling on the town. The Germans and the Austrians were preparing an assault. At the same time, a messenger from the 11th Russian Division arrived and begged Col Mościcki to hold the crossing on Bystrzyca. This would give the division a chance to withdraw to new positions. Mościcki did not hesitate and, as he wrote later in his report, "Having examined everything myself, and aware of how serious the situation was, I quickly created a battle formation of my young and small regiment." Charging, the Uhlans broke the line of machine guns the Germans had deployed around Krechowce. "Enemy infantry, seeing an approaching forest of lances and raised sabers, could not withstand and started running away in panic. We hit their troops like a hurricane, chopping and pricking around," recalled one of the soldiers of the 2nd Squadron. Importantly, it was not just any infantry that gave in to the Uhlans, but the elite Bavarian infantry, who were famous in the Imperial German Army for their toughness and grit. When the Uhlans arrived in the center of the village, the Bavarians had already consolidated and reorganized to fight again. However, the Poles managed to hold their positions until the Russian infantry reached the other bank of the river. In the evening, Col Mościcki ordered his forces to withdraw. The bridge was destroyed, but they managed to ford the river. The commander of the 11th Russian Division was grateful to the regiment for saving his troops, and went forward with his whole staff to meet and thank Mościcki's men.

THE POLISH REGIMENT ONLY HAD ABOUT 500 SABERS, yet resisted two battalions of German infantry supported by Austrian artillery and cavalry for more than five hours. 31 Uhlans fell, five officers and 46 Uhlans were injured. For the Polish state, Col Mościcki's battle at Krechowce became a symbolic victory over the three invaders: Russian marauders and German and Austrian troops.

THE POLISH REGIMENT ONLY HAD ABOUT 500 SABERS

Insurgents STRIKE BACK

PGZ
POLSKA GRUPA ZBROJENIOWA

Wiktor Pniewski

He was a hell of a soldier, and sometimes a stubborn devil. During the Wielkopolska Uprising against Germans, together with a group of subordinates, he organized the first air raid in the history of Polish aviation.

ANXIETY OF GERMAN SOLDIERS STATIONED AT THE FRANKFURT ODER AIRPORT was growing as aircraft were approaching. “Whose machines are those? Ours? Not ours?” they kept wondering until the first bomb fell on a nearby hangar. The explosion resulted in complete chaos – the Germans were running in confusion, not knowing whether to shoot or hide. An attack from the air was the last thing they had expected, and what they saw were aircraft with the unmistakable Polish “checkerboard” on their wings whizzing above their heads. It was January 9, 1919, and the Polish aviation had just carried out its first bombing. The creator of this idea and one of the participants was Sergeant Wiktor Pniewski, who had been appointed the commander of the Air Station at Poznań-Ławica airfield.

SGT PNIEWSKI WAS BORN IN 1891 to a family of a postal clerk. He had been dreaming of flying since childhood, so when he was enlisted in the Prussian army, he did his best to make his dream come true. He became a pilot observer, and when WWI broke out he was sent to the western front. Later he served at the then German base at Poznań-Ławica.

REGARDLESS OF HIS SERVICE IN THE PRUSSIAN ARMY, he always remembered he was Polish. From December 1918, he fought against the Germans in the Wielkopolska Uprising. He was among those who stormed his former base. The insurgents gained the biggest loot in Polish military history: almost 300 aircraft and observation balloons, many of which were immediately ready for combat. Later, some of them were sent to Warsaw and others were incorporated into the 1st Wielkopolska Air Squadron.

BUT BEFORE THAT HAPPENED, Sgt Pniewski, the newly nominated commander of the seized airport decided: “To Frankfurt!” Six planes took part in the operation and they reached their destination in 75 minutes. During the air raid they dropped 36 bombs, weighing a total of 900 kg, within an hour. The Poles destroyed one hangar and one German aircraft; however, what really mattered was the psychological effect they achieved. The Germans understood insurgents from Wielkopolska were able to carry out attacks deep into Reich-held territory. This had a significant impact on German activity. In order to minimize the risk of possible retaliation, the Germans stopped conducting raids on insurgent positions. When Sgt Pniewski and his men returned to Poznań, his superiors gave him a real earful, as the operation was on his own initiative. Fortunately, he did not suffer any consequen-ces for his actions and the raid itself quickly became a symbol of Polish heroism and resolve.

AFTER THAT, SGT PNIEWSKI FOUGHT NEAR LVOV, in a battle against Ukrainians, and later also against the . He was awarded the 5th Class Virtuti Militari for his efforts and service to the Polish state. In the following years, he reached the rank of colonel, fought in WWII, and after the war he worked in the National Institute of Meteorology. He died in 1974 and went down in history as one of the first aces of the Polish Air Force.

DAD, I MUST GO TO WAR...

Lwów Eaglets:

Jurek Bitschan (1904–1918)

Antoś Petrykiewicz (1905–1919)

PGZ
POLSKA GRUPA ZBROJENIOWA

OJCZYZNO ŚWIĘTA
BĄDŹ POZDROWIONA
PRZEZ TYCH
CO Z DUMĄ ZA CIEBIE
MRĄ

The Daredevil Hill badge

IN THE FALL OF 1918 WWI was coming to an end, and Poland lived in hope that after 123 years it would soon become an independent country. However, the Poles still had to fight for the borders of their future state. On the eve of November 1, the day when Polish people pray for their dead, Ukrainian troops captured Lwów – a historic Polish city inhabited also by an Ukrainian minority. Surprised residents were not ready for defense and only a few groups of volunteers associated in the Polish Military Organization started the fight to maintain the city until regular troops arrived. The city's residents, including teenagers and students, decided to lend a helping hand.

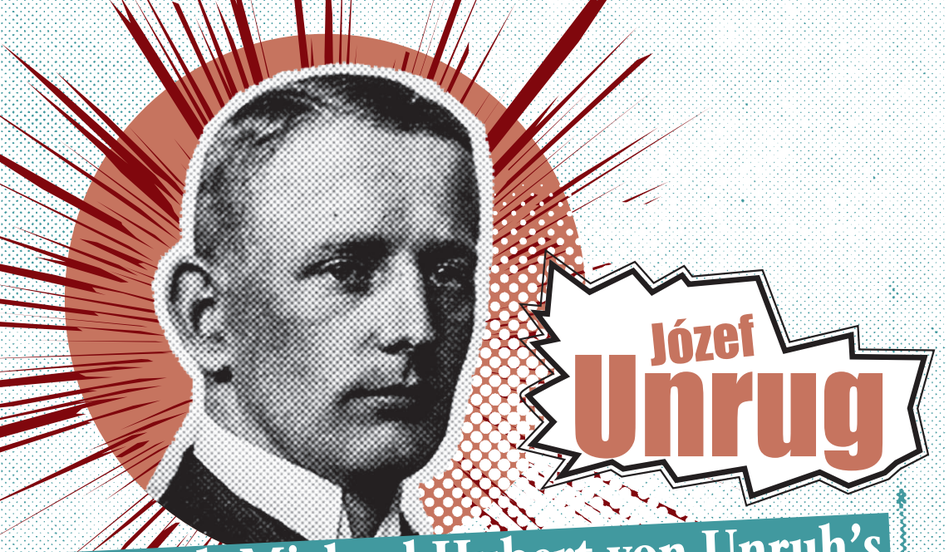
"DEAR DAD, today I am going to volunteer for service in the army. I will find enough strength to serve and survive." – that was the message Jurek Bitschan, a 14-year-old student, left for his parents. The tiny boy was so desperate to become a member of a defense squad that its commander finally gave in and let him join a team led by an experienced warrant officer. The team had a plan to attack barracks taken by Ukrainians. The operation was planned for November 21, and the day was meant to be a baptism of fire for Jurek and his friends.

A RAIN OF SHOTS pinned the attackers down. Jurek's commander tried to cover the boy, but fell, hit by a bullet. Jurek and a group of his friends continued the charge, and he himself was running in the front. Heavy fire broke the line of attack again and only a few survived. Jurek was among them and they all managed to reach the Łyczakowski Cemetery. The boys tried to hide amongst the tombstones, but their dark silhouettes were clearly visible against white snow, and became an easy target. Crossfire from St. Jacek's Hill left no one alive. Jurek's body was found by his father the following day. He was lying in a pool of blood, covered with white chrysanthemums. He was posthumously awarded the Cross of Valor.

THE DAREDEVIL HILL is a legendary place in the center of Lwów. It became an unconquerable post defended by Lt Roman Abraham. Every day more and more volunteers joined his troop. There were many boys among them, who went there right after school and refused to be sent back home. Most of them held weapons for the first time, but they made the best of a bad bargain trying to show their courage and determination. The squad grew to 300 people, and there was one that stood out, the 13-year-old Antoś Petrykiewicz, a brilliant junior high-school student. He was an excellent scout, and during fierce fights for every street and every house, he managed to sneak around despite heavy fire in order to provide his commander with information on the enemy's positions. He was the first to fight and volunteered to cover the rear of his squad during the fiercest fight for the city, when Polish troops tried to seize a railway station. More than 200 defenders were killed in the fight, and Antoś was one of those who fell. The boy's death reverberated throughout the city: "He was a relentless fighter and fought no worse than old soldiers did." – his commander remembered. Antoś Petrykiewicz was the youngest to receive the War Order of Virtuti Militari.

THE SACRIFICE of the Lwów Eaglets was not wasted – the defenders kept fighting until Lt Col Michał Karaszewicz-Tokarzewski's troops relieved them. Lwów was a Polish city for the next 20 years.

THE SACRIFICE OF THE LWÓW EAGLETS WAS NOT WASTED. LWÓW WAS A POLISH CITY FOR THE NEXT 20 YEARS



Józef Unrug

Joseph Michael Hubert von Unruh's father was a Prussian general.

Joseph spoke better German than Polish until the end of his life. Despite all this, after WWI Joseph Michael Hubert von Unruh chose Poland as his home, changed his name to Józef Unrug, and became one of the fathers of the Polish Navy. He even bought the first vessel for the newly established service.

A PRUSSIAN Who Turned POLISH

AFTER WWI, POLAND RECEIVED 140 KM OF THE BALTIC COAST. There was no infrastructure whatsoever and only one small harbor. It was obvious the country had to build its navy from scratch. Knowing this, the Germans wanted to take advantage of the situation and convince the international community that Poland was unable to secure navigation; therefore, control over this part of the Baltic should return to Germany. A survey vessel that could be used to mark out safe routes was an absolute must for the Poles, but the Germans had no intention of selling one to Poland. At least not until Józef Unrug went to Gdańsk.

ON A COLD DECEMBER DAY IN 1919, Unrug arrived in German-occupied Gdańsk to purchase a flat-bottomed steamboat called the "Wotan". He spoke impeccable German and had a noble German surname, so no one even suspected that he was in fact a Polish Navy officer. Unrug made a deal with the unaware ship owners, the Behnke&Sieg Company, and bought it. Years later Józef Unrug recalled: "At that moment I became, for the first, and probably the last time, a legal owner of a ship." The old Wotan was soon modernized, renamed to ORP Pomorzanin, and started service as a survey vessel under the Polish flag, which was of fundamental significance for the newly revived state.

JÓZEF UNRUG WAS A SON OF A PRUSSIAN GENERAL, who in the course of time discovered his Polish roots, and so did his relatives. Józef himself started his naval career in the Imperial Fleet as a submarine commander; however, when Poland regained independence, he did not hesitate. Full of energy he joined the process of establishing the Polish Navy. In 1925 he became the Admiral of the Fleet. After the German invasion and the start of WWII, he commanded the coastal defense. Although that part of Poland was quickly cut off from the rest of the country, the Poles defended it bravely. The last bastion of resistance, the Hel Fortified Area, capitulated on October 2, 1939, a few days after Warsaw fell into German hands.

ADMIRAL UNRUG SPENT THE REST OF THE WAR IN NAZI POW CAMPS. The Germans tried to convince him to switch sides and return to his father's citizenship. They promised he would keep the rank he held in the Polish Navy. Unrug consequently refused. The Germans even invited his cousin, a Wehrmacht General, to persuade him, but Unrug refused to speak German and explained in French that he had taken an oath of allegiance to the Republic of Poland and had no intention of breaking it. Despite his fluent knowledge of German, he communicated with the camp administration through an interpreter. "I forgot how to speak German on September 1, 1939," he stressed.

AFTER THE WAR HE COULD NOT, and did not want to go back to communist-led Poland. He left for Morocco to work for a fishing company. Later, he was a supplier at a hospice in Lailly-en-Val, France. He died there in 1973. In his last will he made it clear he wanted to be buried in Poland, but only after a respectable funeral of his former subordinates, killed by communists. That did not happen until 2018, 45 years after his death.

ORP Pomorzanin

THE LUCKIEST MAN AMONG THE UHLANS

Władysław Belina-Prażmowski

The first winter of the Great War found Commander Piłsudski's troops in the mountains.

In December 1914 his Legions were fighting Russians in the Beskidy Mountains. When Piłsudski learned that Russian tabors got stuck in one of the mountain routes, he sent his trusted commander, Lieutenant Władysław Belina-Prażmowski, and his Uhlans to attack them. To Piłsudski's horror, soon after the Uhlans departed, other scouts arrived and reported the Russians were in fact stuck in the mountains. However, they were not a tabor, but rather infantry and artillery. Piłsudski thought that his cavalry was gone forever.

AN HOUR LATER BELINA PLUNGED INTO PIŁSUDSKI'S HEADQUARTERS SHOUTING:
"Commander! Almost all Uhlans are ok. I lost fifteen. Five of them are already in the hospital, I have no clue what happened to the remaining ten."
"So they survived?" Piłsudski asked.
"Yes, they did! But it was hell on earth. We were under heavy machinegun fire and I lost twenty-two horses."
"You crazy horseman!" Piłsudski shouted, "I don't give a damn about your horses. Uhlans are back, and that's what counts. It's a load off my mind, do you understand, Belina?"
"It's easy for you to say 'Uhlans are back,' Sir," frowned Belina, "but an Uhlan without a horse is worth nothing."

SOLDIERS CONSIDERED BELINA-PRAŻMOWSKI TO BE A LUCKY DEVIL. During all the fights and battles he waged from 1914 to 1920, he was only wounded once, and it was not serious. His luck spread to other soldiers, too. During the first months of the war he only lost six men, and less than 30 were wounded. Though one man's life lost is significant, given the horrific casualties experienced during the war, this was truly remarkable. "Beliniaks," as his troops were called, would go through fire and water for him even though he kept telling them that "An Uhlan must be capable of doing anything! If you don't like this concept, off you go to infantry!"

BY 1915, BELINA-PRAŻMOWSKI HAD ALREADY BECOME CAPTAIN, but no amount of promotions could change him. Fellow Uhlan and writer Andrzej Strug wrote "[...] Captain Belina, mud-spattered up to his eyebrows, [...] Belina, with his swarthy, olive face, lashed with the wind [...] seemed modest, but was actually defiant, wild and joyful, and impudent [...] as if always waiting for an insane order from the Commander, an order to take one and a half squadrons and hit and destroy a Russian corps, capture a fortified stronghold. [...] Belina, with blades of straw on his pants and a mop of hair, smelling like a horse and with a cup of vodka drunk for breakfast."

AFTER THE WAR, AS LIEUTENANT COLONEL, Belina helped create the 1st Cavalry Brigade, which he later commanded during the Polish-Bolshevik War. In April 1919, he and his men seized Vilnius. That made him famous and earned him promotion to colonel. Commander Piłsudski wrote: "This is the most glorious military deed committed in this war by Polish cavalry." Unfortunately, soon after the conflict with the Bolsheviks, Col Prażmowski asked to be transferred to the reserve. At that time, he was only 33, but the intense life of a cavalryman and numerous hard-fought battles ruined his health. He died in 1938. As with every Beliniak funeral ceremony, they sung "Sleep, dear fellow, in the dark grave, may you see Poland in your dreams."

2 DEFENDING POLAND, DEFENDING EUROPE

ILL. RAFAŁ ROSKOWIŃSKI

PGZ
POLSKA GRUPA ZBROJENIOWA

2 DEFENDING POLAND, DEFENDING EUROPE

In August 1920, the future of the democratic world was hanging by a thread. Poland was blocking the Red Army's push westward to start the fire of the communist revolution in post-war Europe. In a deadly battle on the outskirts of Warsaw, Polish soldiers defeated the Bolsheviks. It went down in history as one of the most significant battles ever fought, and Polish victory defended Europe against communism.

HISTORIA POLSKA ZBROJNA

In the early 20th century, huge territories of Eastern Europe were controlled by three states – Germany, Austria and Tsar Russia. The borders ran across the land that had previously been Poland, more or less along the borders created during the partitions of Poland in the 18th century. At the time, remaining global powers assumed the geopolitical situation was stable, and only Russia's access to the anti-German coalition before WWI shook the balance of power in the region.

During the first years of WWI, the "Great War," the initiative belonged to the Central Powers (Germany, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria and Ottoman Empire) and their forces gradually moved eastwards. The financial cost of waging this war was so great, it led to an economic crisis in Russia. In 1917, communist Russian Bolsheviks took advantage of the social unrest; they organized a revolution and seized power. As a result, civil war broke out in Russia and the Bolsheviks decided to make peace with Germany. By doing so they wanted to end one conflict and focus all their efforts on the fight for full power within Russia. In March 1918, the Bolsheviks and the Germans signed a treaty, ultimately expanding German territory from Estonia in the north to the Black Sea in the south. Peace prevailed.

A few months later WWI ended in the West as well. Germany surrendered and was forced to accept the terms given by the victors during the Paris Peace Conference. Though the treaty primarily focused on the Western front, the German defeat in WWI was of key significance for Eastern Europe. It became clear that Germany, undergoing the post-war crisis and paying huge reparations, would not be able to maintain the territory gained from Russia. The process of withdrawing German armed forces and administrative personnel from these areas began.

UNAVOIDABLE WAR

With German forces withdrawing, a political vacuum appeared from Estonia to the Black Sea. Poland and Bolshevik Russia were the two primary powers who sought to control this area in the absence of Germany. The Bolsheviks planned to restore the fallen empire and export the communist revolution further west. The Poles, on the other hand, wanted to regain the territories they had lost as a result of the partitions. Leadership of both countries felt it was "now or never." Thus the outbreak of war was only a matter of time.

The first battle between Poland and Bolshevik Russia began in February 1919 near the town of Mokre, which today lies in Belarus. Polish forces gained advantage during the first year of the war by defeating poorly commanded and equipped Bolshevik troops. The Poles achieved their first aim of liberating ethnically Polish lands from Bolshevik

IN AUGUST 1920, BOLSHEVIK FORCES STOPPED AT THE GATES OF WARSAW, AND WERE GETTING READY TO CHARGE.

occupation. Since the Bolsheviks were also weakened by the bloody civil war they simultaneously waged, it seemed all of Poland's objectives could be achieved. Polish national leader, Józef Piłsudski, planned to create an area of independent states along the Polish-Russian border, which would separate Poland from Bolshevik Russia. In this way he wanted to build an alliance of states in Eastern Europe (including Poland, Lithuania, Ukraine and Belarus) that would secure the region against the threat coming from the two neighboring powers – Germany and Russia.

In Russia, communists (the Bolsheviks) started gaining advantage during the civil war. Piłsudski was worried that potential Bolshevik victory would allow Russia to apply full resources and effort into the war with Poland. In anticipation of this, Piłsudski ordered another offensive. In April 1920, the Polish Army moved eastwards on the Southern front. The aim was to regain Ukraine and create a state that would be independent from the Bolsheviks. The attack took the Bolsheviks by surprise. They retreated and lost Kyiv, the capital, to the Poles. This was the peak of Polish territorial gains during the war between Poland and Bolshevik Russia.

COMMUNISTS HEADING TO CONQUER THE WORLD

As Piłsudski expected, the Bolsheviks began redeploying their forces from the civil war front to fight against Poland. During the first four months of 1920, the Bolshevik army grew five times the size of the Polish army and could now launch a counter-offensive. Exhausted from constant fighting and facing a much larger force, the Poles began to withdraw. The specter of defeat loomed up. With newly gained momentum, the Bolsheviks began planning the spread of communism to Western Europe. Defeating Poland was only an obstacle on their way to conquer the world. "The fate of world revolution is being decided in the West. The path leads over the corpse of Poland to a universal conflagration.... onwards to Vilnius, Minsk and Warsaw – forward!" – they encouraged their soldiers. During their war with Poland, the Bolsheviks carried out broad propaganda operations in Western Europe. They presented themselves as liberators of workers and peasants, spread communist slogans, and called for a worldwide revolution of the proletariat. Using European communist parties and trade unions, they spread anti-Polish slogans and organized strikes that effectively blocked international aid for Poland. Thus, Poland had to fight single-handedly.

From the Polish perspective, the situation on the front was a disaster. Troops were decimated, soldiers were exhausted and demoralized with continuous retreat. In August 1920, Bolshevik forces stopped at the gates of Warsaw and were getting ready to charge. They were so certain they would be victorious they even formed a future Polish communist government that was supposed to take over power after the final victory. Meanwhile, Polish leadership was developing a battleplan to change the conflict's outcome. Some troops were to stop the Russian march to Warsaw and uphold their positions long enough for the remaining troops to secretly redeploy to the enemy's rear and crush it with one destructive attack. The concept itself was very risky and required perfect coordination. Failure would mean total defeat of Poland. The Poles believed they could apply such a strategy due to the excellent job done by Polish intelligence. They managed to break Bolshevik codes and discover the enemy's exact positions and plans. The day before the battle of Warsaw, Polish leadership knew that charging Bolshevik troops would have their left flank exposed. Communist troops that were tasked to secure the offensive got stuck somewhere in the east of Poland, and were unable to fulfil their task.

THE POLES FIGHT FOR THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

On August 13, the Bolsheviks launched an attack on Warsaw, but Polish troops resisted, and deployed all available forces.

On August 13, the Bolsheviks launched an attack on Warsaw, but Polish troops resisted and all available forces were deployed. The defenders knew their success depended on heroism, sacrifice, and persistence. They either defended their positions or counterattacked to regain lost ones. The two great armies clashed in a deadly battle and hand-to-hand combat was common. On August 16, Polish forces attacked the Bolsheviks' exposed flank. It was a total surprise for the enemy force and the Poles were successful. The Bolsheviks fled in panic across the entire length of the front. It was another breakthrough in the war. The Poles, fortified by their great victory, launched a pursuit of the fleeing communists.

Polish-Bolshevik fights lasted until the fall of 1920. During this time, the initiative across the front belonged to the Polish Army that continued to push eastwards, defeating the communists on the way. Finally, both parties entered into peace negotiations. In accordance with the treaty, Poland regained most of the ethnically Polish areas in the east. Russia was committed to pay war reparations and enable the Poles who lived on the eastern side of the new border to return to Poland. This was a monumental success for the young Polish state that had recently regained its independence on November 11, 1918, following 123 years of subjugation.

The Battle of Warsaw was the decisive battle of the Polish-Bolshevik war that turned the tide in favor of Poland. It was one of the greatest triumphs in the history of the Polish Armed Forces. Polish soldiers' bravery and sacrifice defended the capital, defeated the enemy's main forces, and changed the fate of the conflict. Historians consider it to be one of the most important battles in history as its outcome was of great importance for the future of Europe. The Polish victory over the Bolsheviks at Warsaw stopped the spread of communism to the West and defended democratic states that were plunged into post-war crisis. The Bolsheviks never forgot that defeat. Revenge for the 1920 war significantly shaped the Soviet Union's policy towards Poland thereafter.

PGZ
POLSKA GRUPA ZBROJENIOWA

Teresa Grodzińska

SHE DEFENDED HER VIRTUE TO THE END

36/ PART TWO

31/ PART TWO

PGZ
POLSKA GRUPA ZBROJENIOWA

Teresa Grodzińska

A woman, a nurse, a Prisoner of War. The Bolsheviks held nothing sacred.

Teresa Grodzińska experienced that herself when she was taken prisoner by the Russians in August 1920. She was captured by the Red Army soldiers who tried to rape her. She fought for hours defending herself. She died a hero, weapon in hand, and two dead Bolsheviks at her feet.

AFTER THE POLISH-BOLSHEVIK WAR BROKE OUT, the then 21-year-old Teresa did not hesitate to fight for her country and serve. She volunteered to attend a course for nurses, completed it in July 1920, and was sent to a field hospital.

A FEW WEEKS LATER, near Hrubieszów, the infantry regiment to which her hospital was attached was withdrawing due to heavy Bolshevik fire. Polish troops crossed the river and took positions on the opposite side. The hospital was to be evacuated at the very end. Even though Bolshevik troops were close by, the young nurse stayed with the wounded to the last possible moment. As she withdrew, she assisted many of the wounded over the already burning bridge to the other side. Despite heavy fire coming from both sides of the river, she crossed the bridge several times to take the most severely wounded to safety.

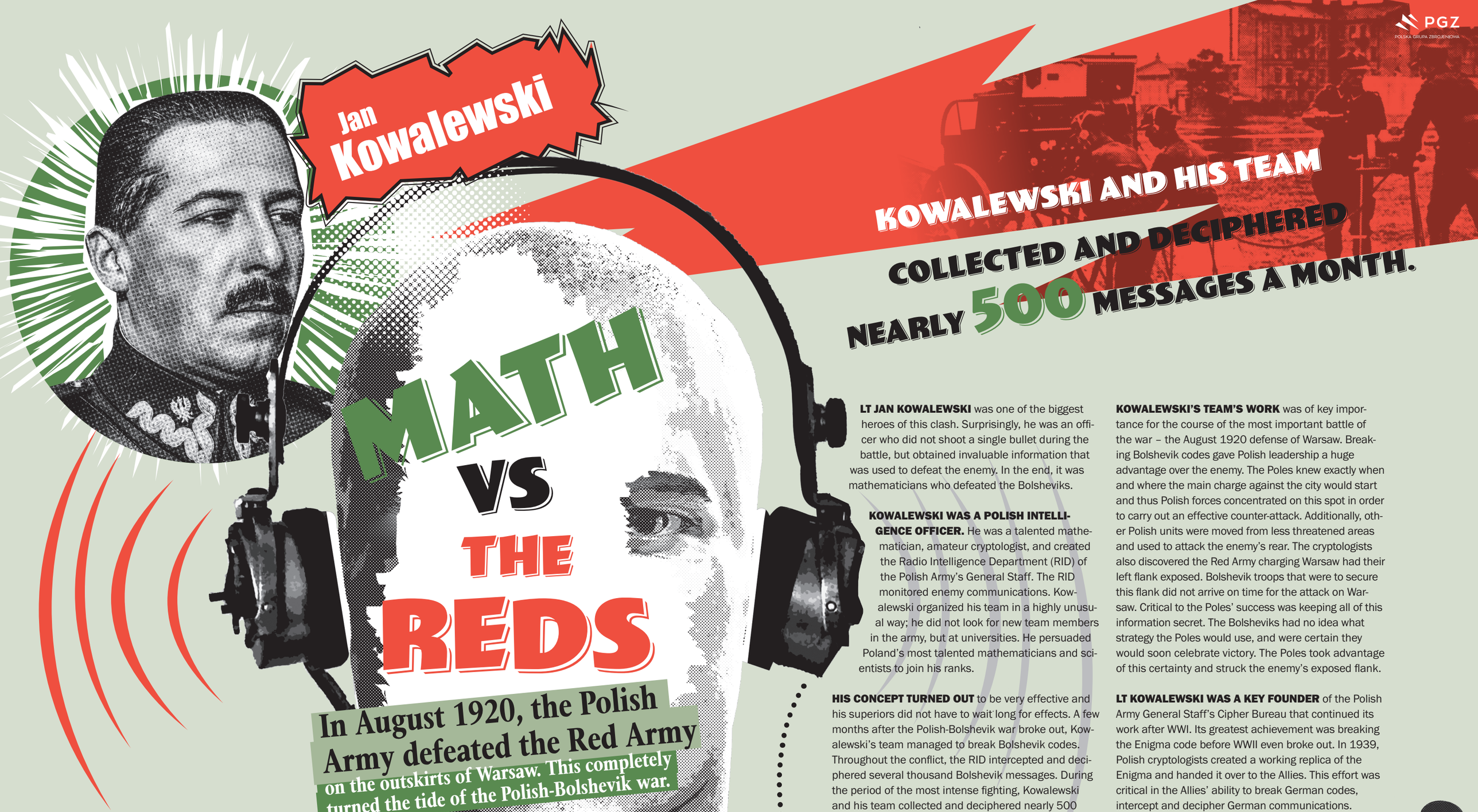
AFTER THE BATTLE, the regiment commander recommended Grodzieńska to be awarded the War Order of Virtuti Militari, Poland's highest military decoration for heroism and courage in the face of the enemy. Unfortunately, the young nurse could not accept it in person.

HER REGIMENT WAS STILL WITHDRAWING UNDER BOLSHEVIK FIRE. On September 1, 1920, they were surrounded by the infamous Semyon Budyonny's 1st Cavalry Army. Polish troops could not break through the Cossack line. Teresa was taken prisoner, together with the entire field hospital of wounded troops, and locked in a stable.

THE NIGHT AFTER THE BATTLE, a group of Cossacks tried to get into the makeshift prison. Their intentions towards the young Pole were obvious, but Teresa was not going to give up easily. She grabbed an axe and for several hours bravely resisted the ferocious Cossacks' attacks. They finally defeated her, but not before seeing two of their Cossack counterparts fall to her fatal swings.

WHEN HRUBIESZÓW WAS LIBERATED BY THE POLES a few days later, soldiers who heard how brave she had been during the regiment's withdrawal found her grave. The body they recovered was so mutilated by Cossack sabers and bayonets that it was hard to recognize whether it was really Grodzińska. They managed to identify her only by finding the initials "TG" embroidered on her nurse apron.

HER FUNERAL TOOK PLACE ON SEPTEMBER 18 IN RADOM and turned into a great, patriotic demonstration. Soldiers whom she had saved risking her life a few weeks earlier at the battle of Hrubieszów walked behind her coffin in the funeral procession. The brave nurse who defended her virtue against the Bolsheviks to her death was posthumously awarded the War Order of Virtuti Militari and the Cross of Valor.



Jan Kowalewski

MATH VS THE REDS

In August 1920, the Polish Army defeated the Red Army on the outskirts of Warsaw. This completely turned the tide of the Polish-Bolshevik war.

KOWALEWSKI AND HIS TEAM COLLECTED AND DECIPHERED NEARLY 500 MESSAGES A MONTH.

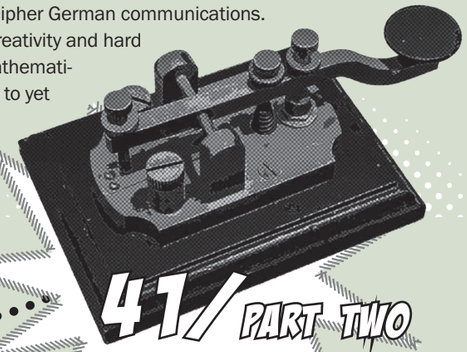
LT JAN KOWALEWSKI was one of the biggest heroes of this clash. Surprisingly, he was an officer who did not shoot a single bullet during the battle, but obtained invaluable information that was used to defeat the enemy. In the end, it was mathematicians who defeated the Bolsheviks.

KOWALEWSKI WAS A POLISH INTELLIGENCE OFFICER. He was a talented mathematician, amateur cryptologist, and created the Radio Intelligence Department (RID) of the Polish Army's General Staff. The RID monitored enemy communications. Kowalewski organized his team in a highly unusual way; he did not look for new team members in the army, but at universities. He persuaded Poland's most talented mathematicians and scientists to join his ranks.

HIS CONCEPT TURNED OUT to be very effective and his superiors did not have to wait long for effects. A few months after the Polish-Bolshevik war broke out, Kowalewski's team managed to break Bolshevik codes. Throughout the conflict, the RID intercepted and deciphered several thousand Bolshevik messages. During the period of the most intense fighting, Kowalewski and his team collected and deciphered nearly 500 messages a month. The team only needed a few hours to decipher one message. They were so good at using Bolshevik codes they even planned to launch fake information, but abandoned this idea for risk of being revealed. Even at the end of the war, the Bolsheviks were not aware their communications were monitored and their codes were compromised.

KOWALEWSKI'S TEAM'S WORK was of key importance for the course of the most important battle of the war – the August 1920 defense of Warsaw. Breaking Bolshevik codes gave Polish leadership a huge advantage over the enemy. The Poles knew exactly when and where the main charge against the city would start and thus Polish forces concentrated on this spot in order to carry out an effective counter-attack. Additionally, other Polish units were moved from less threatened areas and used to attack the enemy's rear. The cryptologists also discovered the Red Army charging Warsaw had their left flank exposed. Bolshevik troops that were to secure this flank did not arrive on time for the attack on Warsaw. Critical to the Poles' success was keeping all of this information secret. The Bolsheviks had no idea what strategy the Poles would use, and were certain they would soon celebrate victory. The Poles took advantage of this certainty and struck the enemy's exposed flank.

LT KOWALEWSKI WAS A KEY FOUNDER of the Polish Army General Staff's Cipher Bureau that continued its work after WWI. Its greatest achievement was breaking the Enigma code before WWII even broke out. In 1939, Polish cryptologists created a working replica of the Enigma and handed it over to the Allies. This effort was critical in the Allies' ability to break German codes, intercept and decipher German communications. That is how the creativity and hard work of Polish mathematicians contributed to yet another victory, this time over Adolf Hitler's Third Reich in WWII.



In the summer of 1920, the Red Army was flooding Poland. It seemed nothing, and no one could stop that wave. The cancer of communism that had been eating away Soviet Russia for years would also spread across Europe.

UNBREAKABLE CHAPLAIN

Ignacy Skorupka

"Forward boys! For Poland! In the name of God! Take heart!"

ALTHOUGH THE SOVIET predominance on the front was overwhelming and the hope of Polish victory was fading, the nation was getting ready for the decisive battle. All available forces were to take part.

IN JULY 1920 the red Soviet wave was rapidly approaching Warsaw. The Polish General Staff, initially taken by surprise, were nevertheless getting ready to strike back. A three day long service was organized in all churches in Warsaw. Hearing of the Polish Army's counterattack, a young Catholic priest named Ignacy Skorupka knew he had to join the fight. It took some time for Father Skorupka to become a military chaplain, but his determination finally convinced Field Bishop Stanisław Gall to give him approval. Skorupka was responsible for pastoral support to youth and students, who in large numbers volunteered to join the army. Units made up of these young people were poorly armed and undertrained, but they had strong faith in victory and were entirely devoted to protecting their fatherland. As a military chaplain, Skorupka was sworn to stay "with his men and never leave them." The presence of the well-known priest gave everyone courage and he himself always tried to cheer up the soldiers and blessed those going to fight.

THE BOLSHEVIKS were attacking along the entire front-line. Heavy gunfire pinned the fighting Poles to the ground. Defense was collapsing and everything seemed to be lost. Right then, the commander and the priest exchanged glances, made the sign of the cross and leaped to their feet. "Forward boys! For Poland! In the name of God! Take heart!" A priest running by the commander, a raised crucifix in hand, his black cassock blowing in the wind, must have been an unusual sight, but it gave new strength and hope to those following him.

SOLDIERS, hearing their commander, attacked. A massive Polish line formation rose from the ground and rushed forward with a battle cry. The Bolsheviks were completely stunned with the size of the counterattack. Charging Polish troops seemed to be unstoppable, and, unexpectedly, they managed to turn the tide of the battle. Decimated Bolsheviks were forced to withdraw. In their chaotic flight, they went straight into the bayonets of units coming to relieve troops fighting in Warsaw. At one point in the battle, Father Skorupka stopped to kneel beside a dying soldier. At that moment a bullet caught him in the temple, killing him instantly.

THE BATTLE OF WARSAW was the first ray of hope during the war. The whole capital waited for victory, and it was on its outskirts that the Bolsheviks started their withdrawal. Church bells announced victory to the inhabitants while the wounded and dead were being retrieved from the battlefield. The priest's body, pricked with bayonets, was found in the evening. His funeral became a great patriotic manifestation. His unprecedented bravery was appreciated throughout the country. Ignacy Skorupka was 27 when he fell. He was posthumously decorated with the Virtuti Militari for his heroism and courage. He would forever remain the symbol of the Battle of Warsaw, known in Poland as "the Miracle at the Vistula".

The battle of Warsaw was the first ray of hope during the war.

PGZ
POLSKA GRUPA ZBROJENIOWA

Kornel Krzeczunowicz

UHLANS VS COSSACKS

Unfortunately, the sunset on August 31, 1920, did not end another bloody day of the Polish-Bolshevik war. In the purple light, Polish cavalrymen saw woods around the village of Komarów moving as if they were alive. “The woods are coming!”– Captain Kornel Krzeczunowicz shouted to his Uhlans. The opponent, however, was far more sinister than the Scottish knights from Shakespeare’s “Macbeth” – it was the famous 1st Cavalry Army, the prominent Red Army military formation led by Semyon Budyonny.

BOLSHEVIK CAVALRY FOUGHT AND LOOTED CONQUERED AREAS the same way Genghis-Khan had, leaving burnt soil and piles of corpses behind. Cruel and seasoned Cossacks charged against Polish Uhlans. The disproportion of forces between the Poles and Cossacks was already frightening: twenty Bolshevik regiments against six exhausted and bleeding Polish ones. The Poles, however, did not think about their chances and faced the challenge.

THE 9TH UHLAN REGIMENT took on the first attack and was literally swallowed by the galloping swarms of Cossacks. This, however, let Capt Krzeczunowicz form his 8th Regiment in a line of squadron columns and move in a trot towards the enemy. Cossack horses were tired after a one and a half mile gallop and the horsemen did not expect to see a new compact formation in front of them, so they slowed down and started closing ranks. That one short moment was enough for Capt Krzeczunowicz – 50 yards from the Bolshevik front he shouted the battle order: “Spread, gallop, charge, charge – hurray!”

WITH A BATTLE CRY, Uhlans of the 8th Regiment attacked the enemy together with the dispersed squadrons of the 9th Regiment and technical squadrons of the 1st Uhlan Regiment located nearby as cover for artillery. The Uhlans fought fiercely, taking revenge on Budyonny’s grunts for all the earlier defeats and the atrocities they had done to the civilian population. The Cossack barrage broke as quickly as it began its charge. In fear, the Bolsheviks retreated to the same forest they came out of. Darkness covered the battlefield of the greatest cavalry battle of the Polish-Bolshevik War.

THE CHARGE OF CAPT KRZECZUNOWICZ inspired the whole 1st Cavalry Division to a victorious fight with Budyonny’s three divisions. Years later, Capt Krzeczunowicz recalled: “The decisive moment comes. Everybody joins the charging 8th Uhlan Regiment, everybody is producing their sabers and pistols. [...] With a slap of my saber I make my stallion go faster, the whole regiment is fiercely charging and in the blink of an eye reaches the enemy. So strong was the charge that the enemy could not withstand it and their troops started retreating along the whole frontline. It was a great spectacle I will never forget.”

THOSE MEMORIES BROUGHT HIM RELIEF while he was on exile after WWII. Unable to return to Poland, dominated by communists after 1945, he decided to stay in England where he published articles and books on the history and glory of Polish cavalry.

Filip Śmiłowski

HE DID NOT WANT OTHERS TO RISK THEIR LIVES FOR HIM

Leave no man behind. Every soldier knows this is the essence of the brotherhood of arms, forged while serving shoulder to shoulder. The last moments of Capt Filip Śmiłowski's life perfectly embody that rule. He knew his soldiers would come to his rescue, and he deliberately forbid them to do so.

IT WAS APRIL 4, 1920, the time of fierce Polish-Bolshevik fights in Ukraine and Belarus. The machinegun and rifle fire was intense and it was becoming more and more dangerous by the second. The Bolsheviks could enter the Polish trenches at any moment. The Poles tried to organize defense, but the enemy significantly outnumbered them. The 10th Company of the 15th Infantry Regiment, commanded by Capt Filip Śmiłowski, was in great danger, and there was a serious risk the entire troop would be wiped out. Capt Śmiłowski ordered his men to withdraw.

RIGHT THEN, TRAGEDY STRUCK. An enemy artillery shell exploded near Capt Śmiłowski and knocked him to the ground. When the smoke and dust cleared, stunned Śmiłowski realized he was not able to stand up, both his legs were severely wounded. When his men found out what happened to their commander, two of them decided to go back under heavy fire and recover him. The shooting was so fierce that while trying to move their commander to safety one of the soldiers was instantly killed and the other seriously wounded. Capt Śmiłowski knew his troops would not leave him at the mercy of the Bolsheviks and more of them would come to his rescue. He did not want his men to risk their lives for him and likely be killed in the process. For him surrender was not an option, so he chose another solution. He knew that if the Bolsheviks captured him alive, they would shoot him. He ordered his troops to continue to withdraw and he reached for his gun. He left on his own terms.

FILIP "JAŚKO" ŚMIŁOWSKI CAME FROM A JEWISH FAMILY and his father was a merchant in the city of Łódź. He was a Polish patriot. At the very beginning of the Great War he joined Józef Piłsudski's Legions. He was serious, disciplined, and dedicated to his service; thus, he was quickly promoted and became a platoon leader. Demobilized after the war ended, he joined the army again when the Polish-Bolshevik war broke out in 1919. He went to the war as a soldier of the 15th Infantry Regiment. For his heroism at the battle of Stodolicze he was promoted to the rank of captain.

IN ORDER TO COMMEMORATE their commander, his subordinates undertook steps aiming at awarding Capt Śmiłowski the War Order of Virtuti Militari, Poland's highest military decoration. When they put his name forward for decoration they wrote: "Filip Śmiłowski joined the Legions in 1914. He was an experienced, tireless, and brave soldier, a model to follow, fought in all battles of the 1st Regiment. He also deputized the Company Commander. He was one of those who never failed, be it in attack or in defense."

ŚMIŁOWSKI WAS AWARDED the decoration posthumously, in 1922.

PGZ
POLSKA GRUPA ZBROJENIOWA

Bolesław Zajączkowski

POLISH THERMOPYLAE

The legendary Battle of Thermopylae was fought in the ancient times by outnumbered Spartan troops against a substantially larger force of Persians. It has become a symbol of soldiers' dedication and courage on the battlefield, and armies across the world who have found themselves hugely outnumbered in battle often compare their struggle to Thermopylae. For the Poles, their "Thermopylae" was the Battle of Zadwórze waged on August 17, 1920 during the Polish-Bolshevik War.

AT ZADWÓRZE, the Bolsheviks significantly outnumbered the Poles. 330 Polish soldiers had to stop the charge of Cossacks from the famous Semyon Budyonny's 1st Cavalry Army. It was ten times the size of the Polish force. The stakes were high, because the Bolsheviks were headed to conquer the Polish city of Lviv with a population of 200,000 people, and the Polish garrison stationed there. Even though the Cossacks won the battle at Zadwórze, the aim was achieved. The Poles put up a heroic fight against the overwhelming enemy, delayed the Cossack advance, which allowed the Lviv Polish garrison to prepare and later successfully defend the city and drive off the Bolsheviks.

A POLISH BATTALION LED BY CAPTAIN BOLESŁAW ZAJĄCZKOWSKI was marching towards Lviv to join the Polish forces positioned around the city to defend it against the Soviet attack. They chose the shortest route, along railway tracks. Near the village of Zadwórze, roughly 20 miles from Lviv, they came across the enemy. Polish troops immediately began taking fire and the Soviet cavalry charged. The Poles managed to resist Soviet cavalrymen, took positions in the Zadwórze railway station, and seized a nearby hill. They established a hasty defense and awaited further attacks from the Bolsheviks, fully aware that they were the only thing stopping the Bolsheviks from advancing on to Lviv. The fight lasted non-stop for eleven hours. During that time the Bolsheviks made six attempts to seize the hill, but were each time driven back by the Poles.

THE BOLSHEVIKS CALLED FOR THE POLISH DEFENDERS TO SURRENDER, but Capt Zajączkowski only shouted: "Guys, we are fighting till the last bullet!" Soon the defenders realized they were running out of ammunition. Capt Zajączkowski ordered his soldiers to try to break contact and withdraw to nearby woods. This however turned out to be impossible. The Bolsheviks maintained contact and a bloody bayonet fight started. The Poles refused to surrender and fought fiercely until the very end. Many of them decided to commit suicide. Also the commander, Captain Bolesław Zajączkowski, decided to do so.

AROUND 320 POLISH SOLDIERS DIED DURING THE BATTLE OF ZADWÓRZE. The Battle enabled the Lviv garrison to organize an effective defense of the city. The Poles' fierce resistance in their fight against a ten times stronger opponent brought about an unexpected result – Budyonny gave up his march on Lviv, afraid that Capt Zajączkowski's unit defeated by his soldiers was merely the vanguard of the approaching Polish forces.

A TANKER AHEAD OF HIS TIMES

Lt Piwoszczuk and his troops did something unheard of, and prepared for a nighttime armored attack.

Michał Piwoszczuk

AN ARMY led by General Józef Haller arrived in Poland in June 1919. As they wore the distinctive blue French uniform, the soldiers were quickly nicknamed the “Blue Army.” General Haller’s Army was formed at the end of the Great War on the Allies’ side. When they returned to Poland, they became the most advanced part of the revived Polish Armed Forces and its soldiers were equipped with state-of-the-art weapons and hardware, including tanks and aircraft.

THE ARMY returned home right on time, as bloody fights with the Ukrainians and the Bolsheviks commenced in the east. The Polish 1st Tank Regiment, equipped with modern French Renault FT tanks, advanced first. The Regiment played the role of a “fire brigade” during the Polish-Bolshevik War. Its companies were sent to the most dangerous parts of the front so they could force the Cossacks to retreat under their cannon and machine guns' fire.

IN JULY 1920, the Red Army had the initiative. The Soviets pushed on withdrawing Polish forces. During fierce fighting for the Neman river crossings near Grodno, the 2nd Tank Company was redeployed there to defend bridges and ferries. Polish tanks served as mobile artillery posts and steel monsters that would charge against attacking Cossacks.

LT MICHAŁ PIWOSZCZUK, the 1st Platoon commander, thrived during charges against attacking Cossacks. Before he joined the Blue Army, he was a commander of assault platoons in the Austro-Hungarian Army, on the Italian front. He successfully adapted the brave tactics of the assault platoons to his armored unit. One morning the Bolsheviks invaded Polish infantry positions. Applying these tactics, Piwoszczuk’s tank platoon charged the enemy’s column and completely destroyed it.

THE FOLLOWING NIGHT he did something even more impressive. The night was not an ideal time for armored forces to fight, but Lt Piwoszczuk and his troops did something unheard of and prepared for a nighttime armored attack. As night drew in and the Cossacks launched their horseback attack against Polish infantry and resting tank crews, they were met with the fury of Polish armor.

THE TANKERS waited for orders as they heard sounds of the approaching Bolsheviks. At Piwoszczuk’s sign, they started up their Renaults’ engines and began one of the first in history nighttime armored attacks. Piwoszczuk recalled: “[My] tanks continued to rain down fire. Nine cannons and six machine guns were shooting towards flashes of fire coming out of the enemy’s barrels. They were shooting in that direction only, as the dark night did not allow for any precise aiming.” The Cossack attack was entirely broken. Scouts sent to patrol the battlefield found only dead bodies of soldiers and horses. This is how the Bolshevik cavalry charge against Polish tanks ended. Lt Piwoszczuk was awarded the War Order of Virtuti Militari for the fights at Grodno.

FIRE!!!
FIRE!!!
FIRE!!!

6760

RENAULT FT

PGZ
POLSKA GRUPA ZBROJENIOWA

RAMBO IN THE POLISH WILDERNESS

In the early 20th century, Polesia (today's Eastern Poland, Belarus and Ukraine) was one of the most desolate and inaccessible areas of Europe. Rivers, swamps and virgin forests did not attract too many settlers. It was extremely remote – rivers, rising in the spring, regularly cut the very few settlements off from the rest of the world. War, nevertheless, somehow managed to get even there.

Włodzimierz Augustyn

MANY ARMIES HAD LOST THEIR WAY IN THE SWAMPS OF POLESIA, and it was no different in 1919, when less than a year after having regained its independence Poland once again had to defend its borders. On January 12, 1919, the Red Army advanced westward and Bolshevik soldiers were ordered to conduct a deep reconnaissance up to the Neman and Szczera rivers, and up to the Bug river in February. The Poles stopped the Soviet offensive quite quickly and in early March they seized Pinsk, an important transport hub.

THE GATES OF POLESIA WERE OPEN. It happened at the time of heavy spring snowmelt, which turned land into sea. Capt Karol Taube remembered later: "Here and there one could see sandy hills that looked like islands, with small villages on top of them. Polish troops under the command of General Antoni Lisowski, scattered around the villages, found themselves in a very difficult situation." In order not to let the troops die, and keep Polesia, the Pinsk Flotilla, commanded by Lt Count Jan Giedroyc, was established on April 19, 1919. Sailors appointed to serve in these swampy areas did not hide their discontent. Initially, they used river boats to deliver supplies to locations that were cut off by water. Sailor Włodzimierz Augustyn, who came from Silesia, was one of the "wretches" serving on a river boat. During World War I he had served in the German Navy and fought in a number of sea battles, and here he had to "slosh in mud and sluggishness."

IN THE SUMMER, the level of water remained high due to heavy rains, which was unusual for this time of the year. Thus, the Polish command made the decision to use the flotilla also for combat operations. Włodzimierz Augustyn was among those who were tasked with seizing the village of Horodyszcze taken by the Bolsheviks. On the morning of July 3, 1919, sailors charged in motor boats. The boat of petty officer Kossowski, with Augustyn as one of the crew members, reached the bank first. As they were approaching the bank, the propeller of their boat got stuck in a wire obstacle installed by the Bolsheviks and the crew became an easy target for the Soviet HMGs. Augustyn quickly pulled out the HMG installed in the bow, wrapped himself with belts of ammunition and jumped into the knee-deep water. Much like John Rambo, Augustyn started shooting at Bolshevik machinegun nests, whose fire focused on him.

MIRACULOUSLY, HE WAS NOT WOUNDED, let alone killed. As he reached the bank, other boats joined the assault on the Bolsheviks, forcing the Soviets out of trenches and successfully driving them away from Horodyszcze. Augustyn became the hero of the first battle waged by the Polish Navy after regaining independence, and received a great reward for a soldier forced to fight in such a remote and hostile place – a pass to a city full of women, wine and music.

PGZ
POLSKA GRUPA ZBROJENIOWA

3 THE BEGINNING OF THE BLOODIEST WAR IN HISTORY

ILL. RAFAŁ ROSKOWIŃSKI

3 THE BEGINNING OF THE BLOODIEST WAR IN HISTORY

Left to its own fate, attacked from both the west and the east in September 1939, Poland had no other choice but to withstand the nazi and Soviet aggression alone. Polish soldiers fought two enormous armies to the last bullet. They lost, but refused to give up. They kept fighting for the liberty of their own nation and the entire world on all fronts of WWII.

HISTORIA POLSKA ZBROJNA

In September 1938, the leaders of four European powers (Germany, Italy, Great Britain and France) met in Munich to decide on the future of Czechoslovakia. The meeting was a result of a diplomatic campaign of nazi Germany, which had declared itself the protector of the German minority living in Czechoslovakia and demanded its government's consent to the annexation of a region known as Sudetenland to the Third Reich. Since the choice seemed to be between war and agreeing to Hitler's terms, the European leaders agreed to the annexation of about 40 % of Czechoslovakian territory to the Reich without even asking Czechoslovakia for its opinion. The rest of the country was taken by nazi Germany several months later.

"My good friends, this is the second time there has come back from Germany to Downing Street peace with honour. I believe it is peace for our time. We thank you from the bottom of our hearts. Now I recommend you go home, and sleep quietly in your beds." – said Neville Chamberlain, British Prime Minister, after his return to London. It soon became obvious that "peace for our time" would not last long. Winston Churchill, one of Chamberlain's political opponents was much closer to the truth when he commented on the results of the Munich Conference: "Owing to the neglect of our defences and the mishandling of the German problem in the last five years, we seem to be very near the bleak choice between War and Shame. My feeling is that we shall choose Shame, and then have War thrown in a little later on even more adverse terms than at present."

Germany triumphed. After taking Rhineland in 1936 and the annexation of Austria in 1938 (Anschluss), Germany's aggressive diplomacy helped it gain even more territory, namely Czechoslovakia. Western Europe, afraid of the possible outbreak of war, kept yielding to the Reich and Hitler's demands. Politicians such as Chamberlain truly wanted to believe the Fuehrer's assurances that he only aimed at annexing territories inhabited by the Germans.

POLAND – HITLER'S NEXT TARGET

After losing WWI, Germany had to agree to the creation of independent Poland. The new state was made up of territories occupied by Germany after the end of the Great War in the Eastern Front. On the strength of the Treaty of Versailles, Poland was also provided with access to the Baltic Sea, which meant that the territory of Germany was divided in two by the Polish Pomerelia (eastern Pomerania), referred to as the Polish Corridor. Throughout the interwar period, there were groups in Germany that openly claimed that Poland had been created at the expense of their fatherland and it was therefore Germany's national interest to require Treaty revision.

After the annexation of Czechoslovakia, Poland was to be the next territory of German

ON THE EARLY MORNING OF SEPTEMBER 1, 1939, GERMAN TROOPS INVADED POLAND. ALMOST 2 MILLION SOLDIERS, 2,700 TANKS AND 1,300 AIRCRAFT ATTACKED ALONG THE ENTIRE FRONTLINE.

expansion. The Third Reich demanded consent to build an extraterritorial highway and railway line running across Pomerania to east Prussia. The Polish government drew a logical conclusion from the situation with Czechoslovakia and assumed that fulfilling German demands would not end the conflict between the two countries, but only encourage Berlin to impose more conditions. Therefore, it firmly stood by the final and non-negotiable provisions of the Treaty of Versailles.

In order to protect itself against possible German aggression, the government in Warsaw entered into military agreements with Great Britain and France. According to the agreements, if Poland were attacked by its neighbor, Western Allies would help defend it. Germany, realizing that this time diplomatic pressure would not help it get new territories, started preparing for war. Upon Hitler's order, a plan of attacking Poland was developed in April 1939. The Polish standpoint was expressed well by Józef Beck, the then Minister of Foreign Affairs: "Peace is a precious and a desirable thing. Our generation, bloodied in wars, certainly deserves peace. But peace, like almost all things of this world, has its price, a high but a measurable one. We in Poland do not know the concept of peace at any price."

STAB IN THE BACK

On the early morning of September 1, 1939, German troops invaded Poland. Almost 2 million soldiers, 2,700 tanks and 1,300 aircraft attacked along the whole frontline. Facing them were 1 million Polish troops with 800 tanks and 400 aircraft. The enemy had great advantage both in numbers and technology, thanks to a very extensive armament program that had been implemented in the Third Reich. Two things gave the Germans additional advantage. First, Polish troops had been deployed right next to the border, not always in areas well suited for defense. This was due to the fear that the Germans, after occupying a part of the Polish territory, would stop the invasion and propose initiating peace talks. Polish leadership decided to defend the entire frontline to prevent the aggressor from taking even the smallest piece of the territory. Second, mobilization announced in late August was called off under pressure of Great Britain and France, which claimed that such decision of the Polish government could provoke Germany's attack. At that time, the Western Allies still believed that the conflict might be resolved by means of peaceful negotiations. The full mobilization announced finally on August 30 was already overdue. The inconsistent orders and decisions caused chaos in the country and, as a result, only about 70 % of units were ready to fight on September 1. Consequently, Poland was not able to stop the German aggression at the border.

German forces pushed towards Warsaw. Polish detachments bravely faced the enemy, but were unable to stop the advancement of the much stronger aggressor. The expected help from Great Britain and France did not come. Admittedly, both countries declared war on the Third Reich on September 3, but failed to undertake any significant offensive operations on the front. The French-German border became an arena of the so-called phoney war, which lasted until as late as June 1940 – Poland's Allies took positions along the Maginot Line, a line of massive fortifications erected after WWI, but they did not begin any offensive action. That could have been the crucial moment of the whole WWII, since the German army, intensively engaged in Poland, had left at its borders insignificant forces which would not have been able to stop an attack of French troops.

In the meantime, the Polish Armed Forces began yielding to the overwhelming enemy force that they had to fight on their own. The command ordered the army to retreat eastwards in order to create a new line of defense along big rivers. However, to the Polish government's astonishment, on September 17 the Soviet Union invaded Poland from the East and ultimately shattered the chances of stopping the German aggression.

The Soviet invasion was a result of a secret agreement signed between Berlin and Moscow in August 1939. The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact (from the surnames of foreign affairs ministers of both countries) provided for dividing the territory of Poland between the Third Reich and the Soviet Union after jointly defeating its army. The Soviets, seeing that Poland was losing the war with Germany, and that its Allies were reluctant to provide any factual military assistance, invaded Poland from the east. The Polish army was not capable of repelling the attack of the Red Army, numbering over 600,000 troops and almost 5,000 tanks.

POLAND UNDER OCCUPATION

The garrison defending Warsaw surrendered on September 28. There were several detachments in the country that were still fighting, but surrounded, bled out, and exhausted, they did not stand a chance against the enemy. Despite the difficult tactical situation, though, a lot of them capitulated only when they ran out of ammunition. The last battle of the first campaign of WWII was fought on October 6 near Kock, located in central Poland. The battle was actually won by Polish troops, but it was the last heroic struggle of the defensive war. The country was taken by the Wehrmacht and the Red Army, and the territory divided between the two powers, in accordance with the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.

Poland was still a player in the war, although its territory had been taken by two neighboring aggressors.

Poland found itself under occupation of both the Third Reich and the Soviet Union. However, the Polish government did not sign a formal act of surrender, and evacuated to Romania together with a part of the army. Romanian authorities, pressed by Germany, broke the agreements signed with Poland and did not give consent for the Polish government to operate on its territory. Polish politicians and military men were sent to internment camps. In order to secure continuity of government, the duties of president were taken over by Władysław Raczkiewicz, who was in France at the time. Also, a Polish government was formed in Paris, and Western Allies accepted the new authorities as legal. Poland was still a player in the war, although its territory had been taken by two neighboring aggressors.

Despite suffering defeat in the fall of 1939, Polish soldiers did not lay down their arms. In the country, they started operating underground and building the Polish Underground State. This worldwide phenomenon had its own army, which grew from the pre-war officer cadre. First, already in 1939, the Service for Poland's Victory was created. It evolved into the Union of Armed Struggle, later renamed into the Home Army, which actively engaged in the fight with the enemy. Its perfectly organized and effective intelligence used couriers to inform allied governments on the extermination machine organized by the Germans on the territory of Poland. Polish intelligence officers were the ones who alarmed the world about the scale of the Holocaust.

Throughout World War II, Polish soldiers heroically fought shoulder to shoulder with the Allies. After Poland fell in 1939, some of them managed to get to France, where they were joined three years later by thousands of soldiers and officers who had been deported to Siberia by the Soviets. Decimated by cold, hunger and diseases, they returned to fight, led by their commander, Gen Władysław Anders. The words "Poland first to fight" became a symbol of steadfastness and courage of soldiers who stood up to two totalitarian states. In the first months of WWII no one knew when and how the conflict would end, but it was certain that Polish soldiers would fight in it until the very end.

PGZ
POLSKA GRUPA ZBROJENIOWA

THE POWER of an officer's Oath

Władysław
Raginis

The Poles were facing a continually charging German force that was 40 times stronger than their own. Ammunition was running dangerously low and casualties were rapidly increasing. It was clear the Poles had no chance of winning the battle. Finally, Capt Władysław Raginis, troop commander, ordered his men to surrender their arms. Capt Raginis himself did not leave the bunker. He promised his soldiers he would not be caught alive, and kept the last grenade for himself. The inscription on the memorial commemorating the heroic defense reads: Passer-by, tell my Fatherland that we fought to the end, fulfilling our duty.

POLISH LEADERSHIP had to take into account the threat that lay in wait in East Prussia, a German enclave on the Baltic coast, as they prepared for impending war with Germany. An effective attack from that direction would let the Germans attack the rear of the main Polish force defending the western border. In order to secure that region, the Poles decided to build a fortified line that was supposed to stop a likely German attack and prevent the Poles from being surrounded.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE FORTIFIED SYSTEM STARTED IN THE SPRING OF 1939 WHERE TWO RIVERS, Biebrza and Narew, met. Unfortunately, the construction began too late and a portion of the fortification was not complete when WWII broke out. The weakest point of the whole strip was located around the Polish village of Wizna. German intelligence must have known about it as their main line of attack ran exactly across Wizna. Unfortunately, the summer before the war was unusually hot and nearby swamps, meant to serve as natural obstacles for the Germans, dried out. These swamps were supposed to canalize the approaching Germans and force them to utilize a narrow road which could be easily engaged by Polish defenders. With the swamps dry, the Germans could easily deploy a wide front and take full advantage of their speed and numbers.

ON SEPTEMBER 7, 1939, a German General Heinz Guderian arrived in Wizna with approximately 40,000 troops and 350 tanks. Guderian's force was also supported by German artillery and air force. Opposing them were 370 Polish soldiers hidden in multiple bunkers. The Poles were heavily outnumbered. Capt Raginis and his men had four cannons, a few dozen heavy machine guns, and two anti-tank guns. The fate of the battle was sealed.

POLISH SOLDIERS KNEW they occupied decisive terrain and they had to defend it for as long as possible. In order to raise the soldiers' spirit, Raginis pledged to defend the position until his death. The Poles were motivated by the spirit of their commander and resisted heavy direct, indirect, and air-to-ground fire. They managed to destroy several tanks, but ran out of ammunition. On September 10, only the commander's bunker was still fighting. Later that day, a German envoy arrived carrying a flag of truce and proposed a ceasefire. Otherwise, Polish prisoners were to be shot. Seeing there was no way out, Raginis ordered his men to leave the bunker and surrender. Raginis was bound by the word he had given to his men and kept the last grenade for himself.

Capt Raginis and his men had four cannons, a few dozen heavy machine guns, and two anti-tank guns.

PANZER ACE

Edmund Roman Orlik

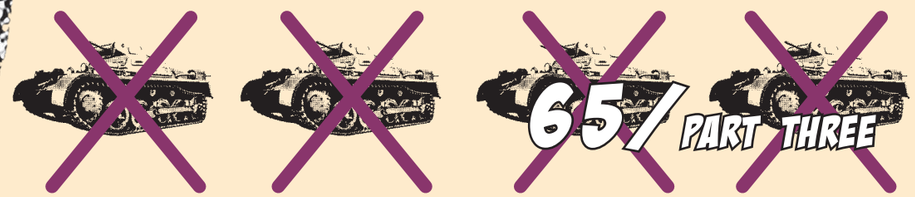
When you're fighting against German Panzers in WWII with a small force of inferior tanks, you're fighting a losing battle. However, if you're able to outsmart your enemy, you can turn the tide to your favor. This is how Edmund Orlik commanded his platoon during the September Campaign. He applied the element of surprise, economy of force, and concentration of fire to overwhelm the superior German force, which resulted in heavy German losses and a Polish victory.

OFFICER CADET EDMUND ROMAN ORLIK went to war straight from his classroom at the Armored Training Centre in Modlin. He was assigned to the 71st Armored Division of the Wielkopolska Cavalry Brigade. During the first days of the German invasion, a few Polish TK and TKS tankettes went under his command. They were inconspicuous machines: low steel boxes with sticking out barrels of either a machine gun or a 20-mm cannon. Though poorly armored, they were very maneuverable and fast. In the hands of an experienced tanker they could be a lethal weapon against German tanks used in September 1939.

Orlik did not have much experience, but he was gifted with a hunter's instinct. After fourteen days of fighting he had already destroyed three German tanks of the 4th Panzer Division.

ORLIK STOPPED HIS TANKETTE RIGHT BEFORE A SANDY ROAD, ONE OF MANY THAT RAN ACROSS THE KAMPINOS FOREST. Scanning his surroundings, he noticed fresh tank tracks in the sand. He assumed that the "game" would be taking the same route back and decided to set up an ambush. He ordered his machines to move back into the forest and wait in silence for the enemy. His instinct did not fail. When two German PzKpfw 35 and one PZKpfw IVB appeared on the road, Orlik immediately ordered his men to open fire. He was aware that his tanks would not stand a chance in a longer fire exchange with much better armed enemy machines. The first German tank was rendered powerless after the first salvo. Three further shots eliminated another one. The crew of the remaining IVB tried to withdraw, but Orlik did not give them a chance. After a short pursuit, a precise shot into the rear armor set the enemy tank on fire. The German orces of the 1st Leichte Division suffered a quick, violent loss at the hands of Orlik and his men.

ON THE FOLLOWING DAY, SEPTEMBER 19, ORLIK'S GROUP OF TANKS ENGAGED IN A FIGHT NEAR SIERAKÓW AND MANAGED TO DESTROY AS MANY AS SEVEN GERMAN TANKS. They did this by following the same simple tactics they applied in the Kampinos Forest. While Orlik's TKs were engaging German tanks with machine gun fire from their flanks, the TKS tanks, equipped with 20-mm cannons, reigned down fire from alternate positions and inflicted lethal blows to the German force. Victor IV Albrecht von Ratibor, the commander of the German platoon and a member of a noble German family from Silesia, was among those killed during the battle of Sieraków. Given the number of enemy tanks destroyed, the high value enemy target killed during the battle, and the impressive tactical prowess of Orlik, from that point forward he was known as the "Panzer Ace," and is one of the greatest tankers in Polish history.



GOLD FOR THE BOLD

Ignacy Matuszewski

IF THE TREASURE were seized by the aggressor, it would surely be used to finance the German War Machine. Therefore, Polish authorities decided to evacuate the gold from Warsaw. The main question was how to get such a big amount of gold out of the war-torn country. The operation had to be grand, like a story taken from the best spy movie – masquerades, intelligence games, bribes and unconventional tricks.

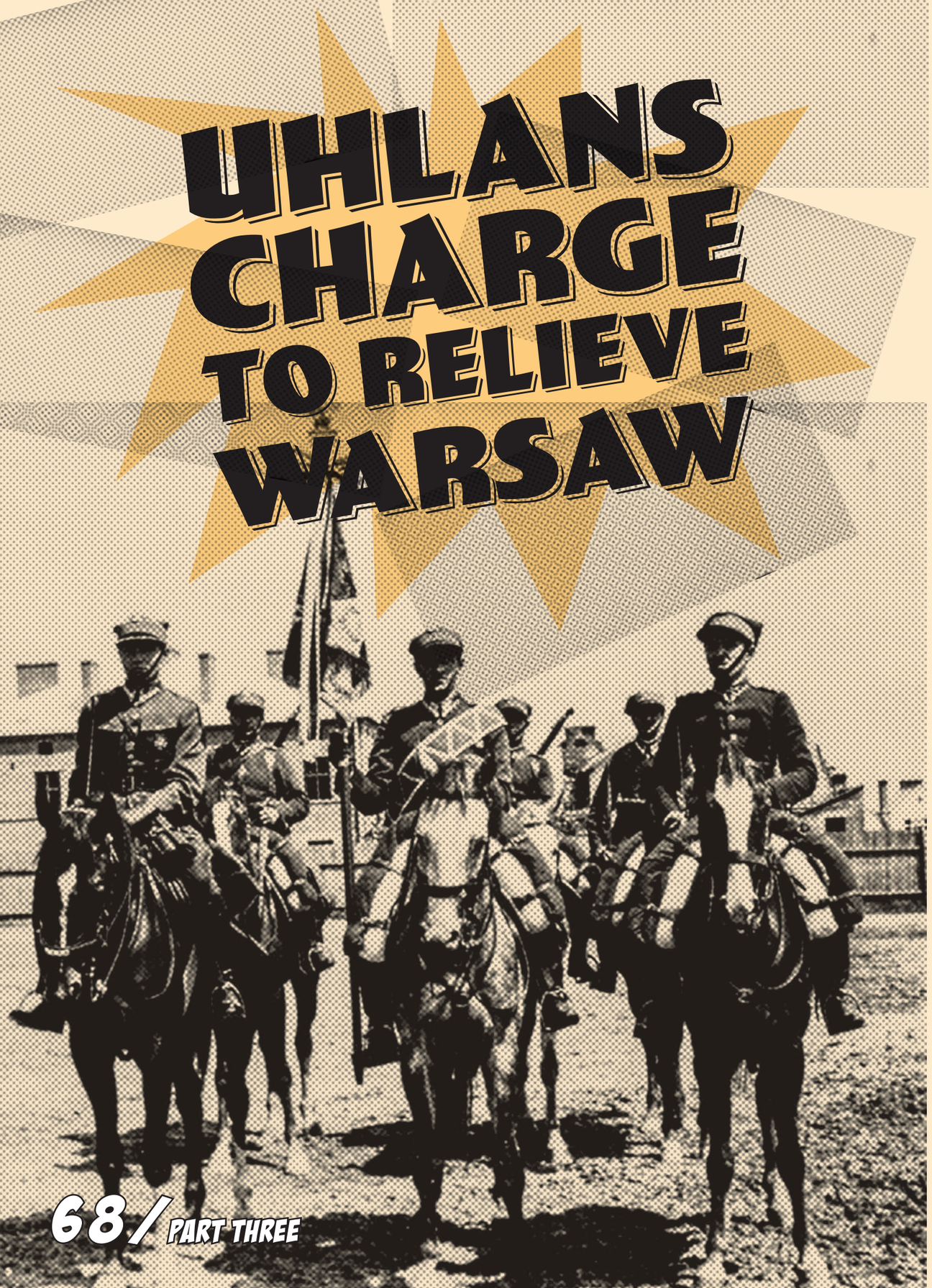
THE TASK of organizing the evacuation operation was entrusted to Ignacy Matuszewski. He reached the rank of colonel during WWI and the Polish-Soviet War. He was moved to the reserves in the mid-1920s. Soon after that he started work at the Ministry of Treasury, even holding the position of minister for some time. Energetic, competent, he seemed to be the perfect choice to carry out this very challenging and complicated task: the gold had to be evacuated discreetly and could not fall into unauthorized hands on the way. The things that had to be taken care of included organizing the convoy, arranging a police escort, determining the route and ensuring constant contact with the authorities. The gold was taken in trucks from Warsaw to Lublin. However, since the German army was advancing quickly, a decision was made to transport the treasure even further east, to Lutsk. Soon, it became obvious that the gold could not stay on the territory of Poland. It had to be taken abroad and deposited in a safe place in the West, for example in France.

ON THE EVENING OF SEPTEMBER 13, 1939, at a railway station near the border with Romania, 70 tons of the Polish gold were transferred into rail cars. The remaining 5 tons stayed in the country to help finance the ongoing war.

The train was sent across the Polish-Romanian border i n the direction of the port of Constanta on the western coast of the Black Sea. The transport reached its destination without any problems, although the Germans demanded that the Romanian authorities stop the train. In Constanta, Col Matuszewski ordered for the gold to be loaded onto a British transport ship whose captain agreed to take it to Istanbul. However, the ship's crew was incomplete and there was a big problem with finding more sailors. Matuszewski personally looked for them in port bars and pubs.

AFTER REACHING ISTANBUL, Matuszewski decided to play a trick on German intelligence, who he feared could block further transport of the gold. He organized a nice performance for them: during the day, empty boxes were transported to another ship, which was to suggest to German spies that the treasure would be transported by sea. In the meantime, the gold was loaded into train cars and sent across Syria to French-controlled Lebanon. Unfortunately, the Germans quickly realized that they had been led up the garden path. Expecting a prompt reaction, in Beirut Matuszewski decided to split the transport into several parts. He did not want to risk losing all of the gold in the event that the Germans decided to, for example, torpedo the ship carrying it. Therefore, the treasure was loaded onto three French war vessels. The gold of the Bank of Poland was saved, reaching Toulon at the beginning of October 1939.

UHLANS CHARGE TO RELIEVE WARSAW



PGZ
POLSKA GRUPA ZBROJENIOWA

The tactics of the Polish cavalry in 1939 anticipated that Uhlans, Polish light cavalry, would fight on foot. The times of charges on horseback were considered long gone. Horses were now primarily used for transportation. Yet nothing surprises the enemy on the battlefield as much as breaking a set pattern. The brave decision to attack the enemy from the saddle let Polish Uhlans defeat the Germans on the outskirts of Warsaw and reach the city.

Edward Godlewski

FROM MID-SEPTEMBER 1939, the German Army gradually tightened its grip around Warsaw. During this time, Polish forces advanced on Warsaw to try and defend it from the Germans. The Germans were aware of the Polish effort and countered the advance. One of the Polish detachments tasked to provide relief to Warsaw was the 14th Regiment of Jazłowiec Uhlans, led by Col Edward Godlewski. On September 19, the regiment reached German forces blocking the east-to-west route into Warsaw. Remarkably, Col Godlewski decided to catch the Germans by surprise and give them something they did not expect – a cavalry charge.

THE UHLANS BEGAN THEIR HORSEBACK charge towards German fighting positions located inside the woods. Col Godlewski and Lt Marian Walicki, 3rd Squadron commander, led the charge along with the colors. The Germans responded with heavy fire, but the Uhlans managed to reach them, sabers in hand. Surprised, the Germans were unable to face the charging cavalry. At one point in the battle Cpl Feliks Maziarski, the flag bearer, was wounded in the hand and his horse was killed by German machine gun fire. As German infantrymen advanced to capture the colors, Cpl Bronisław Czech, a famous pre-war skier and three-time participant of the Olympic Games, sprang into action with a group of Uhlans and recovered the flag from the enemy's hands.

A SPEECHLESS ITALIAN WAR CORRESPONDENT attached to German troops at the time wrote: "Polish cavalry charged at full speed, like in medieval drawings! Their commander galloping in the front with a raised saber. The distance between the group of Polish cavalry and the wall of German fire was closing. It was mad to continue this charge and meet death at the end. However, the Poles made it through!"

EVEN THOUGH THE TROOP SUFFERED HEAVY CASUALTIES (more than 100 Uhlans died during the battle), the Poles managed to break the German lines and the way to Warsaw was open. The brave Uhlans joined Polish soldiers who were defending the capital and took part in one of the last episodes of the defensive campaign in September 1939.

AFTER THE SEPTEMBER CAMPAIGN, Col Edward Godlewski became an officer of the underground Polish Home Army. In October 1944, he was incidentally arrested and put in the Gross-Rosen concentration camp. He died the following year in the German concentration camp of Mauthausen, just a few days before its liberation.

The Germans were advancing from the west in a large column of about 60 tanks. They were moving fast. After they had broken the front line they did not expect any resistance. They dominated with both superior technology and a greater number of troops. The Poles had only one goal – resist the attack for as long as possible in order to let the main forces retreat to defensive positions. That required the ultimate sacrifice.

ALONE AGAINST A COLUMN OF TANKS

Stefan Karaszewski

THE SOLDIERS OF THE 85TH VILNIUS RIFLE REGIMENT SELECTED AN AREA THAT WAS FIT FOR DEFENSE – a small hill on the verge of a forest between the village of Moszczenica and the town of Piotrków Trybunalski in central Poland. Polish troops managed to prepare linear defense and set up machine gun positions, in front of which there was an open area filled with mines. The soldiers hid in shallow trenches, behind trees, and scattered across the meadow on the verge of the forest as they waited for the Germans. Even though they expected tanks, they did not have any heavy anti-tank weapons to engage in a well-matched fight. Seeing the Germans coming, many residents of nearby villages simply ran away.

STEFAN KARASZEWSKI, A 24-YEAR-OLD PLATOON LEADER and resident of a nearby town, Tomaszów Mazowiecki, waited for the enemy at one of the defensive firing positions. All he had was a heavy machine gun, a box full of hand grenades and certainty that he was fighting for a good cause.

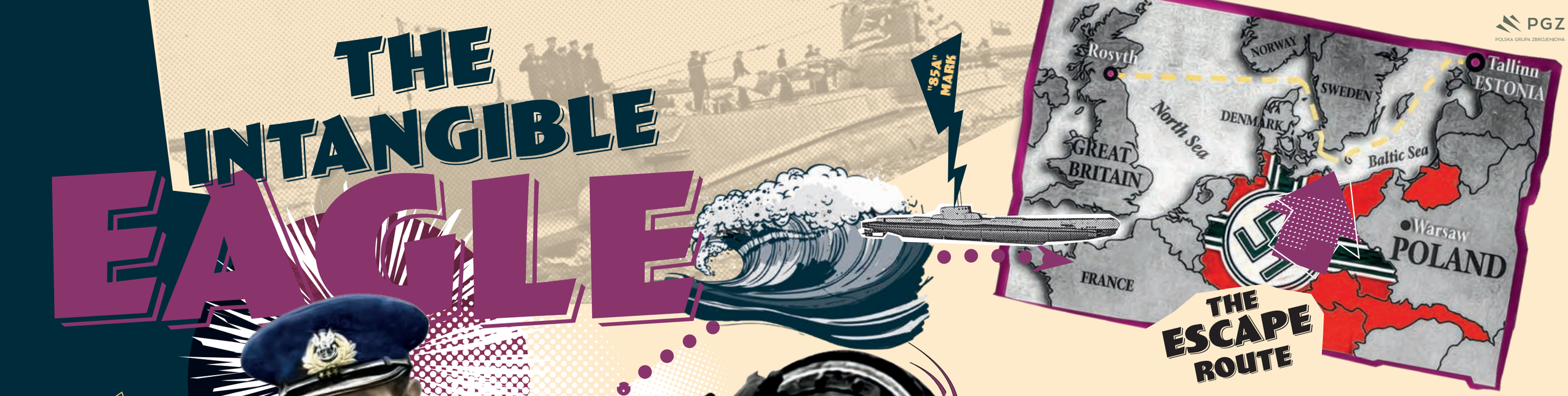
THE FIGHT STARTED WHEN THE FIRST TANKS ENTERED THE HEAVILY MINED MEADOW. Kazimierz Hejduk, one of the soldiers of the 85th Regiment, reminisced later: “I saw Stefan Karaszewski at his HMG position a dozen meters from the railway track. The HMG was on a bipod as Stefan was shooting at German tanks that were attacking us.” It was a lost battle from the start – the disproportion of forces was too great. Aware of the danger, Lt Col Jan Kruk-Śmigla, the commander of the 85th Regiment, decided to withdraw eastwards. Stefan Karaszewski announced he would stay and cover his retreating brothers in arms in order to delay the advancement of the German forces.

HE WAS INDEED SUCCESSFUL – with only a heavy machine gun and a box of grenades, he fought alone for more than two hours. He engaged advancing tanks and if any of them were stopped by a mine, he shot at crews that tried to evacuate. Karaszewski successfully eliminated at least six tanks, but some sources claim that as many as eleven tanks could have been destroyed at the edge of the Moszczenica forest. As a result of Karaszewski’s fire, eleven German soldiers were killed, including two motorcyclists. The lonely fight could not last forever – when he was running out of ammunition and the Germans were getting closer and closer, Stefan Karaszewski decided to keep the last grenade for himself.

RESIDENTS OF A NEARBY VILLAGE FOUND HIS BODY ON THE BATTLEFIELD THE FOLLOWING DAY. They buried him in the foxhole he used during his fight. Later his body was exhumed and buried in a new grave. Today, on top of it is a granite stone with the following inscription: “In memory of Stefan Karaszewski, who fell in a lonely fight against German tanks on September 5, 1939.”

PGZ
POLSKA GRUPA ZBROJENIOWA

THE INTANGIBLE EAGLE



Jan Grudziński

When British Prime Minister Winston Churchill heard about the escape of ORP Orzeł (Eagle) from Estonia to Great Britain, he described it as "the greatest adventure story to come out of the war." The story had a number of heroes, but Lieutenant Jan Grudziński seems to be the most significant figure.

AROUND 02.00 sailors restrained two Estonian guards, started engines, and cut cables holding the submarine at the harbor. Moorings and the gangway fell into the water and ORP Orzeł headed towards the open sea. The harbor crew immediately turned on searchlights and fired machine guns at the fleeing submarine. Artillery soon followed. Every minute seemed to last forever and the suspense was killing the crew. Half-submerged, the boat successfully reached the Gulf of Finland and disappeared under water just before dawn. The crew laid the submarine on the sea bed and waited motionless. Estonians dispatched search vessels to pursue the stolen submarine, and they were circling directly over the motionless Orzeł. Luckily, it remained unnoticed. This is the beginning of the story that a few weeks later fascinated Winston Churchill.

ORZEŁ ENTERED into service just a few weeks before the outbreak of World War II. At that time, she was one of the most advanced submarines in the world. She was commanded by Lt Cdr Henryk Kłoczkowski, an experienced officer valued by his superiors. Jan Grudziński, a 32-year-old lieutenant, became his deputy. Grudziński was ambitious and talented, but at the same time quiet and humble, even shy according to some. In September 1939, Orzeł took part in Operation "Worek" (Bag), meant to protect the Polish coast against the Germans. Soon, her commander started complaining about a mysterious sickness. The Navy command ordered the crew to disembark him at a neutral harbor and continue the operation on the Baltic Sea. Eventually, Orzeł reached Tallinn, Estonia. Lt Cdr Kłoczkowski was hospitalized, but unfortunately, at the insistence of the Germans and the Soviets, the Estonian government interned the submarine. The crew was deprived of almost all navigation aids and most of the armament. Nevertheless, they decided to seize the boat and escape.

ON THE NIGHT of September 17/18, 1939, under the command of Lt Grudziński, Orzeł broke away from Tallinn and evaded Estonian search vessels. For roughly 30 consecutive days following their escape form Tallinn, the crew navigated Orzeł across the Baltic, the Danish straits, and the North Sea to Great Britain, all the while successfully hiding from German ships. The crew was successful thanks to their remarkable courage and determination. The navigation officer, Marian Mokrski, remarkably managed to navigate the submarine to Great Britain by reproducing the map of the Baltic Sea from memory and an old list of beacons. "When we finally reached the coast of England, we didn't even have a drop of fresh water on board. We were pretty close to dying of thirst under water," highlighted Lt Grudziński in his interview for the BBC.

AFTER ORZEŁ had reached Britain, the crew kept on fighting the Germans alongside the Royal Navy. Among others, Orzeł sank the German troopship Rio de Janeiro, killing hundreds of Wehrmacht troops preparing for an attack of Norway. In May 1940, Orzeł, still commanded by Lt Grudziński, departed from Rosyth on her last patrol in the North Sea. Her fate and location of the wreck still remain unknown.

POLISH "UR" AGAINST GERMAN TANKS

In 1939 Polish Army units started receiving wooden boxes marked "Do not open! Measuring device."

In July, a few weeks before the outbreak of WWII, leadership ordered the mysterious boxes to be opened. Inside, they found UR anti-tank rifles. This weapon, produced in Poland, came as a complete surprise to German armored forces. Developed by a Polish engineer, Józef Maroszek, it could effectively penetrate the armor of most tanks used at that time.

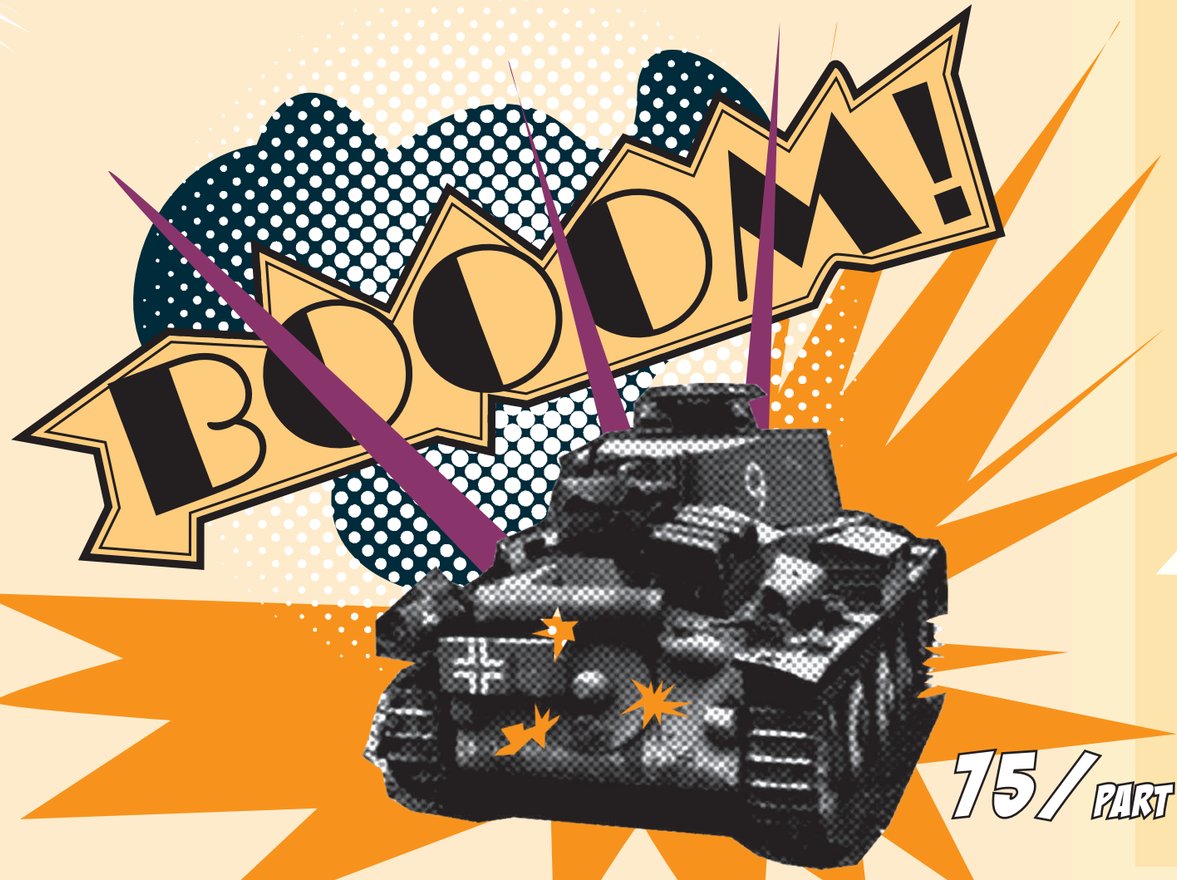
AFTER POLAND REGAINED ITS INDEPENDENCE IN 1918, the country faced the challenge of industrialization. Industry had to be quickly rebuilt in order to facilitate the needs of society. The Polish Armed Forces had massive equipment deficiencies, using weapons and hardware of foreign origin. Thus, without development of a technological base, building a strong army was simply impossible. National production was a great challenge, but made possible thanks to the passion and talent of people like Józef Maroszek, one of the best known rifle manufacturers of the interwar period.

MAROSZEK SHOWED HIS TECHNICAL SKILLS ALREADY IN HIGH SCHOOL. As a teenager he built a miniature steam engine and a generator that powered a light bulb. It was obvious he would continue his education in a technical school. At the end of his studies, he developed improvements to the production process of wz.29 rifles, manufactured in Polish arms factories. His improvements simplified the mass-production process, so the rifles could enter service more quickly and in bigger numbers. The military was very interested in Maroszek's ideas, so the young engineer got a job at the Military Institute of Armament Technology.

MAROSZEK'S MOST FAMOUS DESIGN WAS THE UR ANTI-TANK RIFLE. Before he started developing this weapon, his aim was to create a rifle that would use the typical 7.92-mm cartridge. By utilizing this caliber, the weight of the rifle would be lower and it would be easier to use on the battlefield. On the other hand, it required developing a new type of gunpowder that would guarantee high muzzle velocity and enable it to be used as an anti-tank weapon. Another challenge was recoil. Soldiers called anti-tank rifles produced at that time "bone breakers," because improper handling usually ended with a broken collar bone. Maroszek equipped the barrel with a muzzle brake, turning the recoil of the anti-tank UR to that of an ordinary rifle.

THE RIFLE MAROSZEK DEVELOPED AT THE END OF THE 1930S WAS EXCELLENT. It was capable of penetrating 15-mm armor at a distance of 300 m and up to 30 mm at a distance of 100 m. URs became a threat for most tanks used by European armies during this period. The rifle proved its effectiveness all over the battlefield in 1939. Wherever Polish soldiers used URs, German tankers had to be very careful.

PRODUCTION OF THE NEW WEAPON WAS KEPT SECRET. Its name, UR, is an abbreviation for Uruguay. In order to confuse foreign intelligence it was meant to suggest it was something to be exported specifically to Uruguay. Even Polish Army units received the guns in secret – they arrived in boxes marked "Do not open! Measuring device."



THE CRAZY WWII'S FIRST MAJOR, PARTISAN

On October 5, 1939, Nazi Germany organized a military parade in the streets of Warsaw.

In the presence of Adolf Hitler himself, the invaders rejoiced their first war triumph. But the triumph was not complete. In the mountains located in Southern Poland, the Polish Army troops were still fighting under the command of Major Henryk Dobrzański. Even though he went down in history as the first partisan of WWII, he never considered himself as such. To the very end, he thought of himself as a regular soldier of the Polish Armed Forces. He kept the promise he had made to his soldiers: "I will die in my uniform."

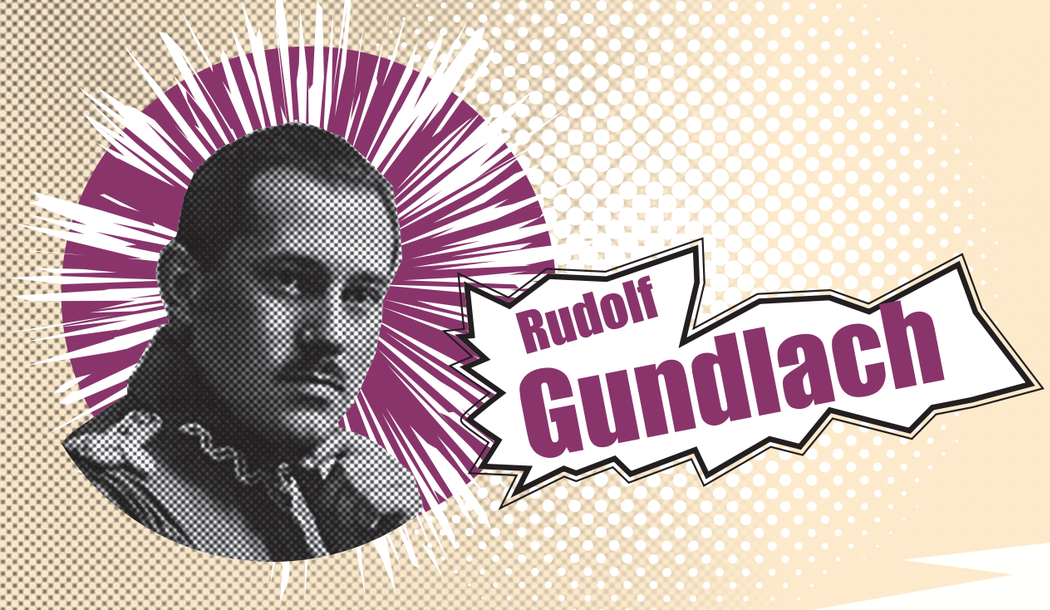
IN SEPTEMBER 1939, Maj Henryk Dobrzański simultaneously fought the Germans and the Red Army with the remains of his 110th Uhlan Regiment. He and his men were moving from North-Eastern Poland in an attempt to reach Warsaw and relieve the city. Unfortunately, on September 28, before his troops managed to get to the capital, he was informed that the city had fallen. Not willing to give up, he collected his most loyal soldiers and moved south to the Świętokrzyskie Mountains to form what he called a Separated Unit of the Polish Army. "We will wait for spring and the French-British offensive, organizing resistance at the back of the German forces" – he told his subordinates. For security reasons he ordered them to adopt nicknames. He nicknamed himself "Hubal" and, acting against conspiracy principles, he did not let his soldiers change their uniforms to plain clothes. They were supposed to fight in uniform to show the local society and enemy forces that the Polish Army had not dropped their weapons yet. He then promised his soldiers he would not take off his uniform until he died. "Seeing them was deeply touching. They gave us hope that not everything was lost, that if the Polish Army was still there, Poland would be free again" – said inhabitants of the region where Maj Dobrzański's unit operated.

THE GERMANS QUICKLY FELT THE PRESENCE OF PARTISANS IN THE AREA. Having destroyed some German units, Hubal proved to the German leadership that they were too fast to announce victory in Poland. The "Crazy Major," as the Germans who chased Hubal nicknamed him, struck them again and again, even though in early 1940 SS and Wehrmacht sent 5,000 troops against him. Support from the local population, bravery of soldiers, and Hubal's innate intelligence let him sneak out from numerous attempts at his life and infuriate the Germans.

THE FIGHT COULD NOT LAST FOREVER. On April 30, 1940, Maj Henryk Dobrzański was finally hunted down and killed. It is assumed he was denounced by a German informer who lived in the area. While resting in a forest camp, he and his men were attacked. As he promised, he fought until the end and died with a gun in his hand.

THE GERMANS KNEW HUBAL HAD BECOME A LEGEND LONG BEFORE HE DIED. After they killed him they displayed his massacred body to show everyone he had been captured and killed. They buried him in an unknown place, in a nameless grave, because they were afraid his tomb might become a place of memory to the resistance against the German occupation. The remains of the heroic leader have never been found, but the memory of Hubal is still alive.

THE POLISH TANK THAT LOST THE RACE AGAINST TIME



Rudolf Gundlach

Appearance of tanks on the battlefields of the Great War completely changed the way wars were waged. Military leaders understood the advantages of using armored giants and pressed development of such weapons. Like most respectable armies, the Polish Army also began developing their armored forces, which lasted until the outbreak of WWII. The core of the new armored branch was to be the Polish-designed 7TP tank, considered one of the best tanks in the world at that time. Regrettably, the conflict broke out too early, when the number of already manufactured tanks was too scarce to turn the tide of this war.

THE 7TP ORIGINATED FROM THE VICKERS E battle tank, a British tank built in Poland under license from the early 1930s. The British construction, however, had a number of flaws, including poor armament, engine, and armor. Polish engineers began modifying and improving the Vickers. Rudolf Gundlach, a soldier and designer, led the Polish team tasked with developing a Polish battle tank.

THE CANNON WAS REPLACED WITH A 37-MM BOFORS gun produced in Poland under license from Sweden. Poland knew this gun well, as Polish anti-armor units were already equipped with it. A 37-mm round could penetrate the armor of almost all tanks used at the beginning of WWII. The 7TP was also equipped with a Diesel engine – it was the first Diesel tank produced in Europe. Using Diesel instead of gasoline increased safety of the crew because it has a much higher flash-point than gasoline. The new engine was also 20 horsepower stronger than the one it replaced, and significantly lighter thanks to its aluminum-alloy construction. Giving the tank more power enabled engineers to increase the armor thickness. Due to all these improvements, when the war broke out, the 7TP's performance, lethality, and survivability was equal to German vehicles. It was already during the war when later versions of the German PzKpfw III significantly overmatched the Polish 7TP.

MR. GUNDLACH'S PERSONAL INPUT TO THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE 7TP was the revolutionary Gundlach Rotary Periscope which made 360° vision possible without changing position inside the tank. Because of this the crew did not have to rely on vision ports located on the sides of the vehicle. Gundlach's patent was later used by manufacturers all over the world.

BEFORE SEPTEMBER 1, 1939, ONLY 132 7TP TANKS HAD BEEN MANUFACTURED. Their insufficient number and associated logistics problems related to spare parts and fuel delivery prevented the tanks from playing a significant role in the defensive war of 1939. For the Polish machine the war came far too early and the 7TP, even though in many ways revolutionary, lost its race against time.

PGZ
POLSKA GRUPA ZBROJENIOWA

4 THE POLISH UNDERGROUND STATE

ILL. RAFAŁ ROSKOWIŃSKI

4 THE POLISH UNDERGROUND STATE

Underground state authorities, parliament and courts. Secret schools, universities and printing shops. Armament factories and armed partisan units. Although Poland was under occupation, the Polish nation refused to surrender and continued fighting for freedom. The Polish Underground State was born in the fall of 1939 and soon became something unique and unprecedented anywhere in the world. The existence of this biggest resistance movement in Europe – the Polish independence underground was possible only because 600,000 brave, outstanding Poles chose to actively engage in its activity.

HISTORIA POLSKA ZBROJNA

In October 1939 Poland was invaded and occupied by its two neighbors – the Third Reich and the Soviet Union. Before the outbreak of WWII, the leaders of the two powers had signed a secret pact to jointly defeat the Polish army and divide the obtained territory into German and Soviet spheres of influence. The Polish government never accepted this decision and refused to sign the act of capitulation. Polish administration evacuated to Romania, but when it turned out that Romanian authorities did not consent for the Polish government to operate on their territory, a decision was made to appoint a new president and prime minister. The chosen politicians were in France at the time, and our Western Allies, Great Britain and France, accepted the new Polish government in exile. This fact was of key importance in both the political and military struggle for free Poland. Although the country was under occupation, it had a legal government in London. The next step was to recreate the Armed Forces by organizing an underground army. This is how the Home Army was born (the first military organization was the Service for Poland's Victory, which evolved into the Union of Armed Struggle and eventually into the Home Army).

A decision to establish a secret organization operating on the territory of Poland was already made at the end of September 1939, in the final days of the Siege of Warsaw. The aim was to organize civilian authority structures in the occupied country, create an underground military force and fight nazi Germany and the Soviet Union until Poland was free. The resistance movement was to confirm the existence of the legal government in exile, unite the Poles around the idea of fighting for independence, and prepare to take over power in Poland after the end of WWII. Although in September 1939 no one knew how and when the war would end, Polish people were certain that the day of liberation would eventually come.

WORLDWIDE PHENOMENON

From the very beginning, the goal of the government in exile in London and its representatives in Poland was to recreate authority structures in accordance with Polish law. There was an underground cabinet of the Government Delegate for Poland, the highest authority representing the government in exile on the territory of occupied Poland, and a parliament – a collective political body made up of politicians from all, except for communist, political parties. There was also a network of courts, both civil and military. In the peak period, around 600,000 Poles were members of the Polish Underground State. Polish newspapers and books were published to provide the Poles with access to reliable information on the course of war and to counteract enemy propaganda. The administration also organized a social welfare system to help families of soldiers killed or taken captive in the war, or those who were active in the resistance movement and had to operate underground.

THE MOST EXTENSIVE MILITARY ACTION OF THE POLISH RESISTANCE MOVEMENT WAS THE WARSAW UPRISING.

Also Polish Jews were under special protection from the very beginning. The Polish Council to Aid Jews, created within the resistance movement, attached to the Government Delegation for Poland, helped persecuted Jews to hide, organized escapes from ghettos and financially supported the activity of Jewish political and military organizations. It was thanks to the engagement of Polish underground activists that the Western Allies learned about the crimes committed in occupied Poland.

Education was of utmost importance in the Polish Underground State. According to the assumptions of nazi ideology, the Poles were to be nothing more than cheap labor working for the benefit of German industry, so the occupants did not provide for the existence of a typical education system. “For the non-German population of the East there can be no type of school above the four-grade rudimentary school. The job of these schools should be confined to the teaching of counting (no higher than up to 500), the writing of one’s name, and the teaching that God’s commandment means obedience to the Germans, honesty, industry and politeness. Reading I do not consider essential.” – these words, uttered by Heinrich Himmler, one of the most prominent nazi leaders, perfectly summarize the concept. Therefore, underground courses were organized all around the country to give young people an opportunity to learn Polish and the history of their country, among other things. Over 1 million children studied in underground primary schools. High schools were attended by about 100,000 teenagers, and universities by about 7,000 students.

ARMS IN HAND AGAINST THE OCCUPANT

In order for the Polish Underground State to execute its main task, that is taking over power in the country, it was necessary to first fight for its liberation and independence. The experience of 123 years of captivity, from 1795 to 1918, taught Polish people that independence is not something given. They knew it would have to be fought for, arms in hand. To this end, military partisan units, subordinate to the command of the Union of Armed Struggle – the Home Army (ZWZ-AK), were being created across the occupied country from the very beginning of the war.

Most armed resistance groups operated in forests and in the mountains, so they were a difficult target for the German police and occupation forces. Home Army units attacked garrisons and industrial plants working for the military. They paralyzed railway and road transport. They assassinated representatives of German occupation authorities, SS, Gestapo and informers. Partisans usually came from regions where particular resistance groups operated, so they knew the area very well. They could easily move around undetected and avoid pursuit. Taking advantage of difficult terrain helped to level the German advantage in numbers and technology. Widespread support of civilians was also a great asset. Despite the ever-looming threat of drastic punishments and collective responsibility, masses of the Poles helped the Home Army soldiers by giving or selling them food, offering their premises for hideouts and meeting places, organizing help for wounded partisans and informing them of the activity of occupation authorities and police.

WARSAW, A STEADFAST CITY

The most extensive military action of the Polish Home Army was the Warsaw Uprising. The decision on organizing the uprising was made in the summer of 1944, when the first detachments of the Red Army were drawing near the suburbs of the Polish capital. The leaders of the Polish Underground State hoped that the outbreak of the uprising would surprise retreating the Germans and after a few days of fighting the insurgents would manage to drive the enemy out of the city. The Poles wanted to free their capital themselves, before the Red Army reached it on their way to the heart of the falling Third Reich. They hoped it would exert some pressure on the Western Allies and change their decisions as to the fate of Poland after the war.

On August 1, at 1700 hours, insurgents started attacks all around the city. Within the first three days they managed to seize most central districts of Warsaw. Unfortunately, assaults on the most important strategic points – bridges on the Vistula river, railway stations, the airport, or the so-called government district with all the main institutions of the occupation authorities – were unsuccessful. On August 4, experienced Wehrmacht front troops entered Warsaw. They had tanks, artillery and air force with them. Underarmed and undertrained insurgent groups did not stand a chance with the enemy that had experience of fighting on the Eastern Front. The Germans began their offensive.

Although the enemy engaged all available troops in the battle, Polish insurgents resisted bravely. Their courage, absolute dedication and unusual tactical solutions helped to level the overwhelming advantage of the enemy. During the day the Germans drove insurgents from their positions, and by night insurgents counterattacked and in turn made Wehrmacht troops withdraw. They fought for every building, every barricade, positions changed occupants several times a day, and enemies often found themselves only meters apart. Polish resistance surprised the Germans, who in order to break the spirit of the defenders began murdering great numbers of civilians. Areas controlled by the Poles were constantly kept under artillery fire and air-bombed.

Days passed, and expected help from outside Warsaw did not come. Western Allies did initiate an action to support the fighting city from the air, but, truth be told, the drops of weapons and supplies were far too insignificant to tip the scale in favor of the Poles. The necessary support could only be provided by the Red Army, which by this time was only meters away from the center of the battle. Joseph Stalin, however, having heard of the outbreak of the uprising in Warsaw, ordered his troops to stop their march westwards and forbid them to provide any help whatsoever to the insurgents. He even prohibited American aircraft carrying supplies to use Soviet airports to get gas for their return flight.

After 63 days of heroic fighting, the insurgents surrendered. They failed to liberate the city or change the decision of Western powers to put Poland in the Soviet zone of influence. They paid the highest price for their dream of free Warsaw. About 10,000 Polish soldiers were killed in the uprising. The fate of civilian inhabitants of the city was also terrible. About 200,000 of them died in mass murders, under the rubble of bombed houses and in fires raging throughout the city. After the uprising, everyone who was left alive had to leave Warsaw. According to Hitler’s orders, the capital of Poland was razed to the ground as punishment for challenging the Reich.

ALLY SHOWS ITS REAL FACE

A tragic epilog to the activity of the Polish Underground State were repressions which Polish patriots were subjected to by the communists who seized power in the country. In Soviet propaganda, it was referred to as “liberating” our country from German occupation. However, for the majority of the Poles this so-called liberation meant nothing else but another occupation. The Polish independence underground, which did not surrender to the communists and remained loyal to the legal government in London, posed a threat to the process of Poland’s full sovietization. Therefore, it was treated as an enemy and fiercely combated.

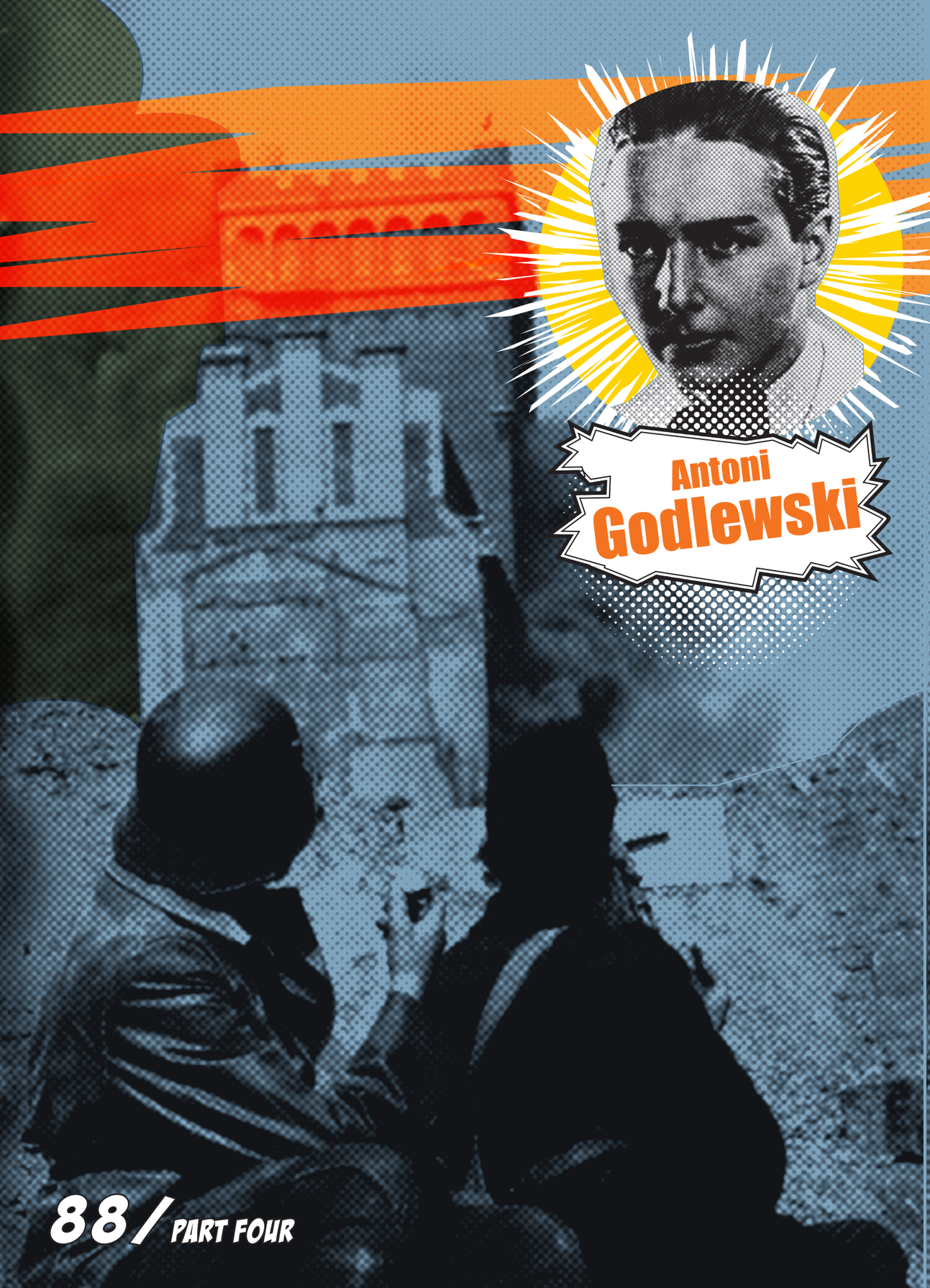
From the very moment the Red Army crossed the pre-war border with Poland, communists began a ruthless war with the Polish Underground State. After the front line had passed, the Polish Home Army groups were immediately forced to disarm, officers and local authorities were arrested and troops were conscripted into units cooperating with the Red Army. The most peculiar charges, such as collaboration with the Germans, were laid against independence underground soldiers. Confessions were extorted by torture and sentences given to convicts in mock trials were exorbitant, including death penalty.

Military partisan units were being created across the occupied country from the very beginning of the war

PGZ
POLSKA GRUPA ZBROJENIOWA

Antoni Godlewski

A POLISH SNIPER SLAYER



Antoni Godlewski

In 1944, Antoni Godlewski was only 21.

However, like many of his peers, he joined the Warsaw Uprising without a moment of hesitation. He wanted to free the capital, his beloved city, from invaders. Although he was killed by an enemy bullet on the eighth day of fighting, he managed to become a legend of the Uprising, for "Antek Rozpylacz" was a "a great guy, an extraordinary friend, a brave soldier."

WHEN THE WARSAW UPRISING BROKE OUT ON AUGUST 1, 1944, the whole city became a battlefield for Polish insurgents and German occupiers. They fought for every house, every street. The positions of both sides of the conflict were very often only meters apart and death was lurking around every corner. Young people, inexperienced and underarmed, but at the same time full of patriotic zeal and will to fight, tried to snatch their freedom from the violent hands of the overwhelming German force.

FOR POLISH INSURGENTS, the most notorious German soldiers were the snipers, lying in wait on last floors of tenement houses, roofs, in attics, lofts, hidden behind chimneys or makeshift screens. They were usually German soldiers or policemen, tirelessly looking down to the streets in search of creeping insurgents, who they would shoot without a second thought. Since snipers usually worked alone and often changed posts, they were very hard to spot or locate.

ANTONI GODLEWSKI WAS ONE OF THE PEOPLE who dealt with hunting and eliminating snipers. During the occupation he was a student at the underground Warsaw University of Technology. Warsaw's native son, he was always the first in line to fight for it. As one of the few lucky ones in the insurgent unit, he had a gun acquired from an Allied arms drop. It was a Sten submachine gun, called "rozpylacz" (sprayer) by the insurgents. The gun gave rise to Godlewski's nom de guerre – Antek Rozpylacz.

"VERY ENERGETIC, LIKE A SPARK, resistant like steel and braver than anyone, he and his Sten were everywhere. Antek was particularly famous for his exceptional military imagination and courage," wrote the insurgent press. "A great guy, a very good friend, a brave soldier," said his colleagues from the insurgent group, as well as girls from the resistance movement, who often had a crush on this extremely handsome boy.

ANTEK ROZPYLACZ TOOK ON THE HARDEST TASKS. He did not think about his safety, he believed in his lucky star, sure that everything was going to be fine. He was particularly good at dealing with snipers, although this was one of the hardest tasks. The first thing to do was to locate the well-hidden shooter, sneak up to the building where he was, go up to the top floor, and there, risking your life, fight him eye to eye. Antek Rozpylacz was indeed a very lucky guy. Within just a few days of the Warsaw Uprising he managed to find and do away with as many as eighteen snipers.

DURING THE MISSIONS, he was always supported by a small group of insurgents, which included his fiancée (nom de guerre Nina) and a 13-year-old Jewish orphan boy, called Miki Bandyta (Mickey the Bandit). Nina cleaned guns, loaded them, and took care of ammunition, while Miki Bandyta ran around the city as a liaison. "Those three, always in a good mood, always full of energy and never tired, were the apple of the eye for the whole assault group," wrote Antek's friends in his obituary.

VOLUNTEER TO AUSCHWITZ

Witold Pilecki

4859

PILECKI'S CAMP NUMBER

Auschwitz – the name raises fear and serves as a symbol of the German plan to exterminate Eastern Europe's population. As prisoners said, there was only one way to leave this infamous concentration camp – through the chimney. Witold Pilecki was one of the few who escaped from the camp and told the world about the atrocities the Germans committed there.

He was also the only one who volunteered to go to Auschwitz.

THE GERMANS set up the first concentration camps in occupied Poland in October 1939. Germany's motive for exterminating Eastern Europe's population was to prepare the area for German settlers who would arrive after the nazis successfully conquered the world. Auschwitz was set up in 1940. Before the end of the war and to the horror of the world, approximately 1.1 million people were murdered there, including the Jews, the Poles, the Gypsies, the Russians, and others.

AS THE GERMANS developed their network of concentration camps, some information on what was occurring behind their walls started leaking out. Polish resistance leadership began to think of ways to help those who were held captive; however, to take any action, they needed accurate first-hand information, so they decided to send an intelligence agent inside the camp to collect information. Witold Pilecki volunteered to take up the suicide mission. In September 1940, he let German police catch him and he was taken to Auschwitz as prisoner number 4859.

DURING HIS THREE-YEAR stay in the camp, Pilecki created a network of underground activists who collected information on German crimes in Auschwitz, organized a system of aid for the prisoners, facilitated escapes, and prepared an armed rebellion. Unfortunately, his activity caught the attention of the camp Gestapo. The Germans knew that the news about the horrific atrocities they committed could potentially leak outside, and in an effort to prevent it, they decided to transport suspected activists to other camps. Witold Pilecki was one of the prisoners selected for relocation, so he decided to escape.

PRISONERS had to conduct forced labor in Auschwitz. Pilecki and his two friends landed themselves jobs in a bakery outside the camp. It operated day and night, and was only guarded by two SS soldiers. It was nearing Easter and prisoners anticipated that the Germans' overall alert level would be lower than usual and minimal manning may be imposed. They decided it would be the best time to escape and made it through the bakery's back door unnoticed. Local resistance movement personnel helped them avoid German chase.

AFTER HIS ESCAPE FROM AUSCHWITZ, Pilecki returned to underground activities and also fought in the Warsaw Uprising. His most important task, however, was to hand over the information he compiled on the camp. In "Pilecki's Report" he provided a detailed description of the organizational structure and crimes committed by the Germans in Auschwitz. The Home Army leadership handed over the report to Western Allies. Unfortunately, similar to the case with the material gathered by Jan Karski, it did not change the fate of those imprisoned.

WITOLD PILECKI, a heroic underground activist, a co-creator of the Secret Polish Army, a Home Army officer, named as one of the six bravest people in the resistance movement of World War II by the British historian Michael Foot, was anything but praised in post-war communist Poland. He was accused of espionage for the Western Allies and seen as an enemy. He was arrested in 1947, tortured, and sentenced to death in a show trial. When his wife visited him in prison for the last time, she asked how they were treating him. His response was very short: "Auschwitz was a piece of cake..."

Auschwitz was set up in 1940. Before the end of the war and to the horror of the world, approximately 1.1 million people were murdered there, including the Jews, the Poles, the Gypsies, the Russians, and others.

PGZ
POLSKA GRUPA ZBROJENIOWA

Michał Kasza, a member of the Polish Underground State, knew he had to get parts of the V-2 missile at all costs. The future course of the war and thousands of lives depended on it.

Michał Kasza

SCRAP WORTH A FORTUNE

THE CASE SEEMED TO BE HOPELESS: they had to find and collect remains of a crashed rocket quickly and disappear. If the SS captured them, they would be executed on the spot. However, Michał Kasza, a member of the Polish Underground State, knew he had to get parts of the V-2 missile at all costs. The future course of the war and thousands of lives depended on it.

MICHAŁ KASZA WAS A LOCAL COMMANDER OF PEASANTS' BATTALIONS, one of several Polish underground formations fighting against Germany during World War II. He also held a deputy position in the underground peasant intelligence network. Local farmers informed him that in a training field in Blizna, southern Poland, the Germans were working on the V-2 rocket. It was one of the so-called German "Wunderwaffe," or "Miracle Weapons" that were supposed to tip the balance in Germany's favor.

THE WORK ON THE ROCKET WAS STILL IN PROGRESS. There were numerous malfunctions, explosions in the air, and mid-flight failures. However, the Germans carefully salvaged all parts of destroyed rockets and made sure that they did not fall into the wrong hands. Whenever a rocket failed, a special SS team secured the area and no one was allowed to enter without their permission. Local farmers were immediately executed for collecting missile remains or entering these areas, even if it happened by accident.

THIS IS WHAT HENRYK AUGUSTYNOWICZ, a forester who lived near the Blizna training field and a member of a Polish underground organization, recalled: "A Pole who was caught in possession of even the tiniest piece was immediately sentenced to death. We worked under permanent stress. To make matters worse, there was a Waffen SS post close to the forest administration building and the Germans would drop in whenever they wanted, pretending they had to use the phone even though they had their own."

THE GERMANS employed local residents to search for and collect pieces of destroyed missiles. For the Polish intelligence service, obtaining rocket parts and delivering them to Western Allies was a matter of honor. British intelligence agencies were eager to obtain these parts in order to understand the latest German technology and learn how to defend against it in the most effective way. They needed the rocket's design and its elements.

KASZA ORGANIZED AN INTELLIGENCE NETWORK of several people who collected parts when alerted to a rocket failure. They risked their lives to fulfill this task, but they knew how important it was. Upon receiving information of a rocket failure, the team started their race against time. They managed to reach V-2 rocket crash sites before the Germans. They would collect all they could carry and disappear into the countryside. Upon reconsolidating, the rockets' remains were passed on and eventually smuggled to Great Britain. The team's greatest find was a transmitter-receiver that was used to control the missile trajectory.

Part of rocket engine

PGZ
POLSKA GRUPA ZBROJENIOWA

THEY HELPED PEOPLE

TRAPPED IN HELL

Jan Wawrzyczek

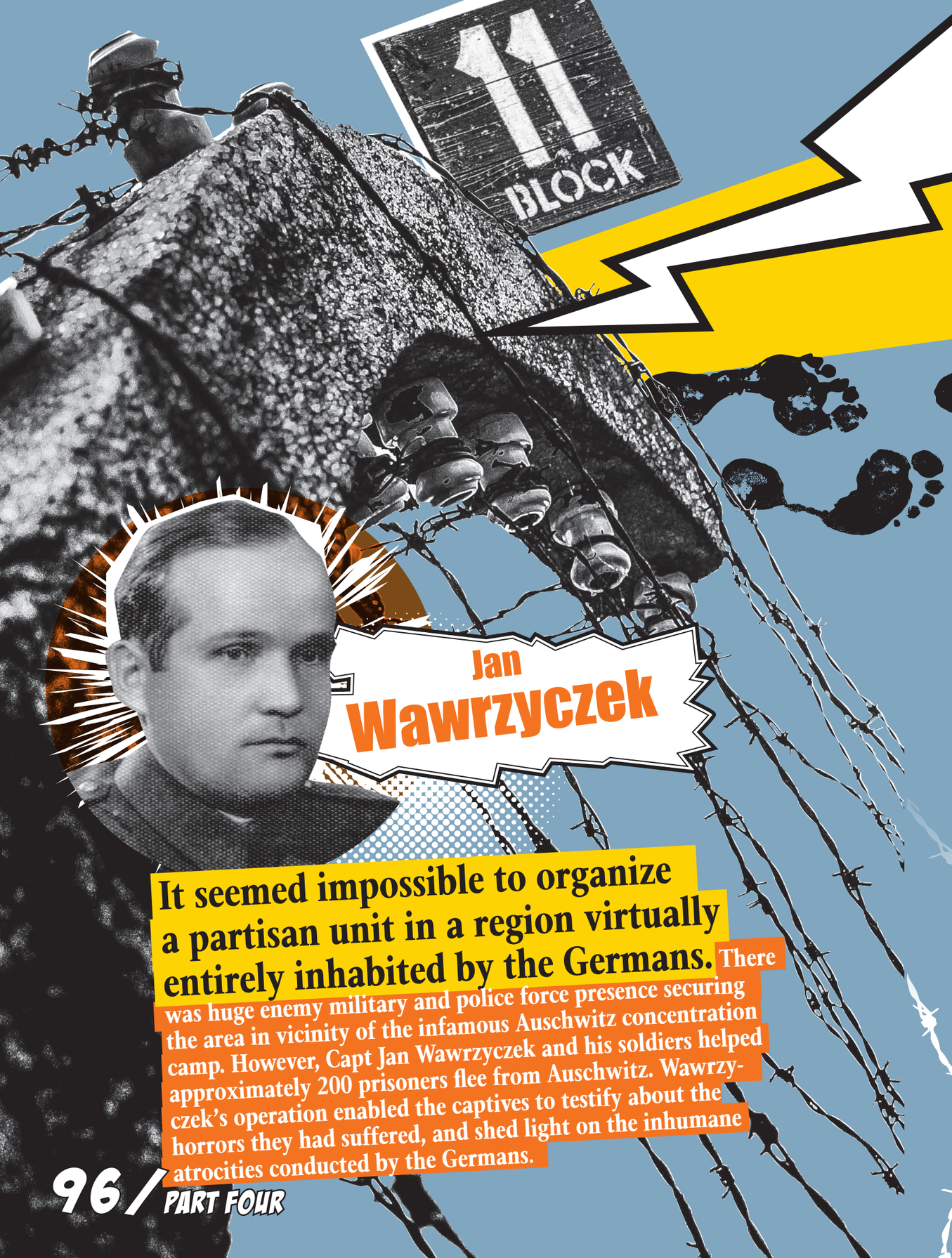
escape

Capt Jan Wawrzyczek and his soldiers helped approximately 200 prisoners flee Auschwitz.

14a BLOCK

HALT! STÓJ!

PGZ
POLSKA GRUPA ZBROJENIOWA



Jan Wawrzyczek

It seemed impossible to organize a partisan unit in a region virtually entirely inhabited by the Germans. There was huge enemy military and police force presence securing the area in vicinity of the infamous Auschwitz concentration camp. However, Capt Jan Wawrzyczek and his soldiers helped approximately 200 prisoners flee from Auschwitz. Wawrzyczek's operation enabled the captives to testify about the horrors they had suffered, and shed light on the inhumane atrocities conducted by the Germans.

The truth about Auschwitz was never supposed to surface.

200 prisoners flee Auschwitz

THE TRUTH ABOUT AUSCHWITZ was never supposed to surface. The Germans did everything they could to hide it. High barbwire and armed guards were only a part of the camp isolation system. After the decision had been taken to set up the camp, most of the local residents were evicted and loyal German settlers replaced them. They served as informers and provided information to the Gestapo about any suspicious events in the area. The remaining Polish population were under heavy surveillance. If they helped prisoners in any way, they risked being put in the camp together with their family. The German force that occupied Auschwitz numbered around 3,000 SS officers and guards, in addition to numerous police and Gestapo stations throughout the neighborhood. They established a railway system into and out of the camp, secured by German infantrymen. There were numerous factories, chemical plants, mine fields, etc., located all around Auschwitz, using slave labor of camp prisoners. Each had guard units and anti-aircraft units deployed in their vicinity. The entire place was crawling with heavily armed German forces. In the given circumstances, organizing a secret movement to help the prisoners seemed impossible.

DESPITE THE TERROR THE GERMANS FORCED on the Polish citizens that lived near the camp, they did not manage to break their spirit. "The local population is fanatically Polish. They are always ready to stand up against the hated SS crew. Any prisoner who successfully escapes from the camp can be sure that as soon as they get to the nearest Polish house, they will receive all necessary help," wrote to his supervisors Rudolf Höss, Auschwitz commander. During five years of operation, about 200 prisoners escaped from the camp. Each of them owed their first days of survival to the local population. Local Poles provided shelter, food, water, civilian clothes, and instructions on where to flee next. Without this crucial help, all attempts to escape would surely have failed. Historians have managed to identify 1,200 people who were directly engaged in helping prisoners escape from Auschwitz. Most were soldiers of a Polish partisan unit called "Sosienki." Their commander, Capt Jan "Danuta" Wawrzyczek was from a local village. From the very beginning, Sosienki concentrated their operations around the camp. They established contacts with the resistance movement operating behind the fence, smuggled food, medicines, correspondence, and documents confirming German crimes. They also organized escapes from the camp.

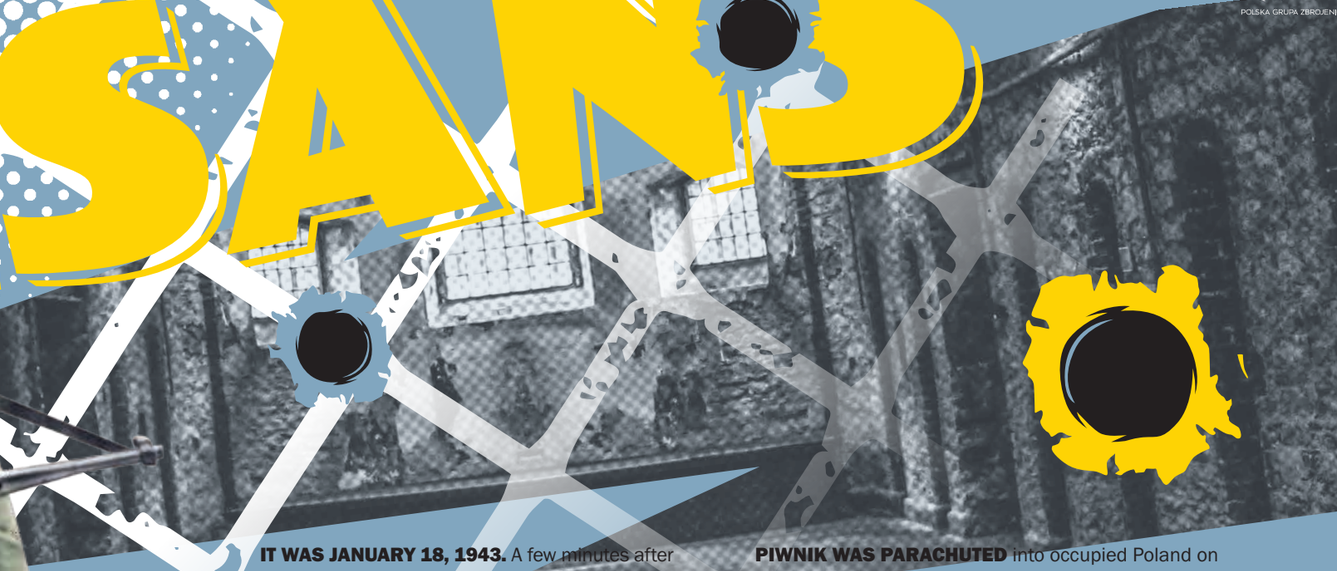
THE FACT THEY CAME from the region was critical to success. They knew the local Poles, the area, and had a network of safe houses and hiding spots. They also knew how to effectively defeat initial German search efforts and, ultimately, how to guide escapees out of the area to safer locations. Capt Wawrzyczek treated every escape individually, planned everything thoroughly, and avoided routine. Thanks to the efforts of his group, each of the 45 escapes he organized were successful. In total, Wawrzyczek was responsible for a third of all successful escapes from Auschwitz.

PARTISANS

LIKE SPECIAL FORCES

Jan Piwnik

Jan Piwnik was one of the most famous Polish partisans of WWII. The Germans were scared to death of him, residents of Polish towns and villages praised him, and the Brits adopted his tactics and techniques as a model to be followed by their special forces.



IT WAS JANUARY 18, 1943. A few minutes after 1700, a black Mercedes-Benz stopped by the prison in the nazi-occupied Polish town of Pińsk. An SS officer got out of the vehicle and screamed at the guard to open the gate. The guard was shocked. This was the first time he saw an SS officer and was unsure if he should follow his orders; on the other hand, the man was a high rank officer of an elite formation. The guard stalled, then panicked as the SS officer approached him, produced a gun, released the safety, and shouted in Russian "Open or die!" The guard did not react. Seconds later, a shot from the Mercedes knocked him down to the ground. The car slowly rolled into the prison yard.

SOON, TWO GROUPS OF SOLDIERS joined the ones from the Mercedes, climbing over the prison walls. In an instant they seized the office, killing the commander and his deputy. They only needed to find a way to get rid of the metal grating to reach the cells. The attackers climbed a guard tower, and lowered themselves onto the prison yard on ropes. They overpowered the guards and released prisoners.

THE SOLDIERS THAT BROKE into the prison with such bravado, under the seemingly watchful eye of three thousand German troops, were not Russian. The use of the language was only a part of the masquerade. This was a signature technique of Jan "Ponury" Piwnik and his men, in which deception was key. Piwnik soon became a legend of Polish guerilla warfare.

BEFORE THE WAR Piwnik was a policeman. He was also a bodyguard for Polish prime ministers Leon Kozłowski and Walery Sławek. He fought in the defensive war in 1939 and later made his way to Britain where he completed training in centers for the "Silent Unseen," a unit of elite Polish commandos who later in the war secretly conducted airborne drops into occupied Poland.

PIWNIK WAS PARACHUTED into occupied Poland on the first flight, in November 1941. As a soldier of a group called "Wachlarz" (Polish for folding fan; an organization for sabotage duties formed by the Union of Armed Struggle – the Home Army), he took part in sabotage operations in the rear of the Eastern Front. He commanded huge Home Army units, first in the Świętokrzyskie Mountains in central Poland and later in the Navahrudak region in the northeast of the occupied country.

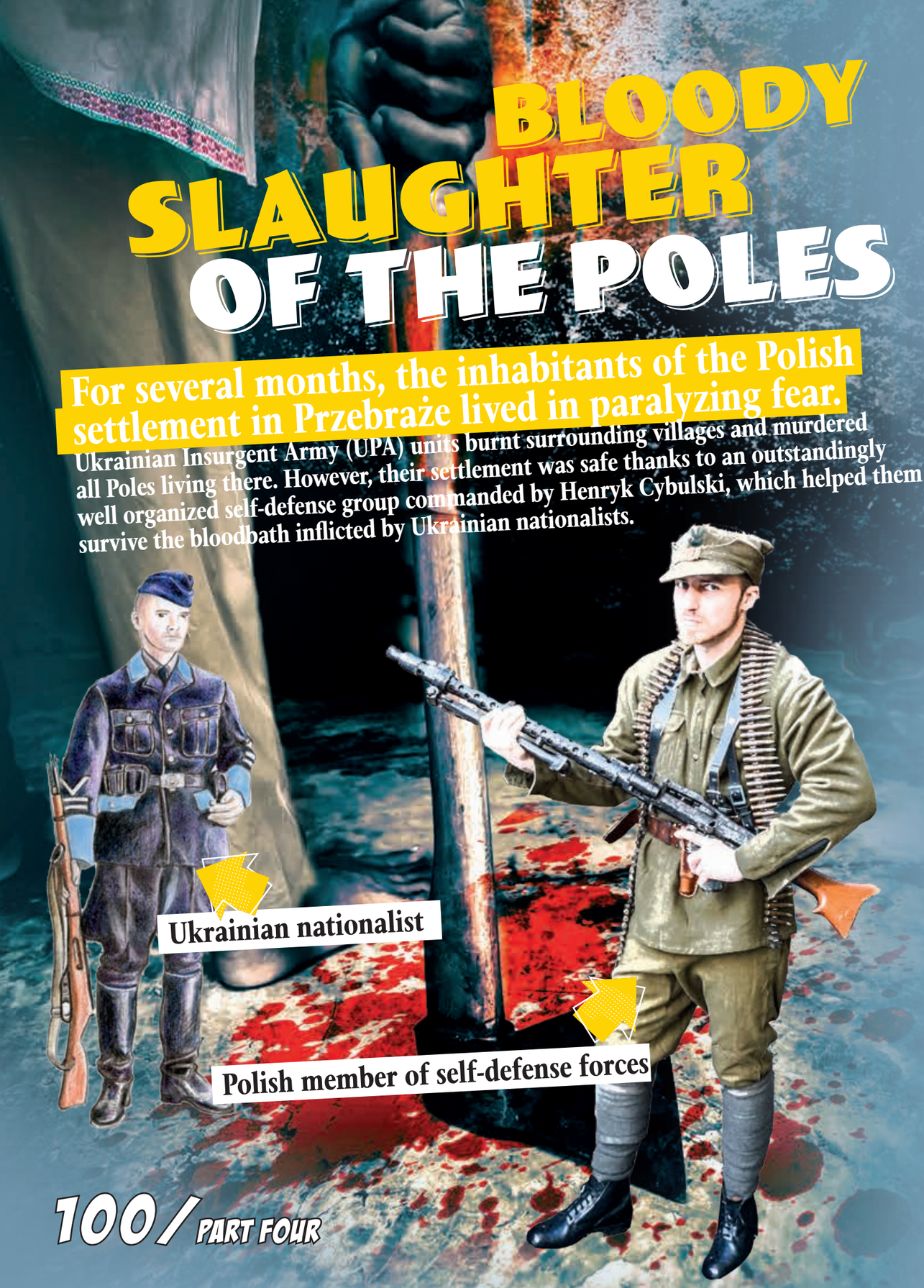
HE HAD A FIRM HAND. Whoever was caught drinking on duty or indulged himself in willful looting had to face a firing squad. Ponury was a man of principles, hard but fair, and at the same time madly brave. His soldiers would go through hell for him; however, the respect they had for Piwnik was nothing compared with the worship of local residents who saw him not only as their defender, but also a judge. On numerous occasions locals requested him to adjudicate even the most trivial disputes.

THE GERMANS DID THEIR BEST TO CAPTURE HIM, but they were afraid to follow him into the woods. Ponury died on June 16, 1944 when his troops attacked a German border station located on the territory of today's Belarus. During the assault the legendary commander was shot in the stomach. Thousands of local residents took part in the funeral ceremony, and the procession was measured in kilometers. It all happened right under the noses of the Germans, who nevertheless did not intervene.

THE MEMORY OF PONURY'S ACTIONS has been kept alive throughout Poland and abroad. His daring tactics and techniques during the assault of the Pińsk prison served as a model adopted by British special forces.

BLOODY SLAUGHTER OF THE POLES

For several months, the inhabitants of the Polish settlement in Przebraże lived in paralyzing fear. Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) units burnt surrounding villages and murdered all Poles living there. However, their settlement was safe thanks to an outstandingly well organized self-defense group commanded by Henryk Cybulski, which helped them survive the bloodbath inflicted by Ukrainian nationalists.



Henryk Cybulski

BEFORE THE OUTBREAK OF WWII, Volhynia, an area in Eastern Poland, was mainly inhabited by the Ukrainians (about 70 % compared to about 15 % of the Poles). In 1943, it became an area of bloody ethnic cleansing, which came to be known as the Volhynian Slaughter, planned and executed by Ukrainian nationalists. The aim was to purge the area of all Polish people, which meant either forcing them to leave or murdering them. The genocide was to form a basis for a new, all-Ukrainian state that would collaborate with the Third Reich. With tacit consent of the German occupier, in February 1943 UPA began attacks on Polish villages. The peak of the massacres took place in the summer.

THE MOST TERRIFYING THING ABOUT THE RAIDS WAS THEIR BRUTALITY. UPA detachments burnt Polish people alive, split them with axes, stabbed them with pitchforks. The Poles were drowned in wells, torn apart by pulling horses, women were raped, fetuses ripped out of bellies. Villages were surrounded at nighttime, burnt to the ground, and all inhabitants – men, women, children, old people – murdered. During one day only, July 11, 1943, on the so-called "Bloody Sunday," Ukrainian nationalists burnt at least 100 Polish settlements. The slaughter in Volhynia and Eastern Galicia lasted for several months, during which UPA murdered about 150,000 Polish people.

AFTER THE CLEANSING HAD BEGUN, many Poles living in the region left their homes and headed westwards in the hope of finding a safe place to live, far from Ukrainian nationalists who were blinded by fury. However, some of the inhabitants decided to face the enemy and started organizing self-defense forces. One of the biggest units of this type was defending the village of Przebraże. Its creator and commander was an inhabitant of the settlement, Henryk Cybulski, a forester and the Home Army soldier.

HAVING HEARD ABOUT THE MURDERS ON THE POLES that started in the spring of 1943 in the Eastern Borderlands, the inhabitants of Przebraże decided to form a self-defense force of about 30 people. They were initially armed with tools available on farms. In April, Henryk Cybulski took command and started to develop the force. The Poles bought guns from German policemen, Wehrmacht troops, and Hungarians stationed in Volhynia. A defense line of foxholes and barbed wire was created around Przebraże. Patrols scouting neighboring villages and settlements were to inform in advance about approaching UPA detachments. Two machine guns were dismounted from Soviet tank wrecks and adapted to be used for defense. There was even a mounted scouts platoon, whose task was to conduct reconnaissance and quick offensive sorties. Cybulski knew that waiting passively for an UPA attack is not the best strategy. Thus, hearing about nationalist units gathering in the neighborhood, he gave an order to attack and effectively destroyed the startled enemy.

THANKS TO IMPECCABLE ORGANIZATION AND DEDICATION of the inhabitants, Przebraże survived the Volhynian Slaughter. The makeshift defense line gave shelter to over 10,000 Poles who flocked to the village from all around the region hearing of its effective defense. The self-defense force also grew, at some point reaching over 1,000 armed partisans and civilians. The strength of the force allowed for repelling several UPA attacks, including the biggest one conducted in August 1943 by a force of over 6,000 Ukrainian nationalists.

PGZ
POLSKA GRUPA ZBROJENIOWA

THE MAN WHO DISCLOSED GERMAN WAR CRIMES

He presented the Allied leaders with evidence on German crimes in occupied Poland.

In London and Washington he described persecutions, tortures, and genocide his compatriots were the victims of. He appealed to the world to stop the Holocaust, unfortunately in vain. No one believed Jan Karski, the emissary from occupied Poland, the emissary from hell.

BEFORE JAN KARSKI ARRIVED IN THE UNITED STATES in July 1943, he had gone a long way, much longer than other passengers flying from London to Washington. Despite his terrible experiences, his heart started beating faster as he entered the White House. With an audience including the most powerful man on earth, Karski planned to detail the gruesome fate the Germans were dealing to people in occupied Poland.

FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT WAS WAITING FOR HIM. The thirty-second President of the United States welcomed Karski and right away asked: "Is the material situation in Poland really that bad?" As Karski recalled, "I answered that I did not know what they said in Washington. However, I provided examples of the planned policy to destroy the Polish nation – starvation food rations, no medicines, corrupting the youth, huge levies farmers had to pay. [...] He asked me to confirm information regarding the persecution of Jews. I explained it was not persecution, but a planned destruction of the entire Jewish nation. I provided examples and mentioned what expectations Jews had of the Allies." Then the President stopped the conversation and said: "We will get even with the Germans after the war. Mr. Karski, correct me if I'm wrong, but Poland is an agricultural state, isn't it? Don't you need horses to cultivate your farmland?"

THAT WAS WHEN KARSKI REALIZED HIS EFFORTS were futile and the effects would be nonexistent, the same as after discussions with politicians in London. Even though Karski was well familiar with the methods of the Gestapo and with his own eyes saw what the nazis did to Jews in ghettos and concentration camps around Poland, he was unable to get his message across to the elite of the Free World. At the most his interlocutors showed sympathy, which unfortunately meant nothing at the time when a whole nation was being murdered in the center of Europe. The situation required action – at least bombing German railway lines leading to extermination camps; however, no one reacted, even though Karski patiently and accurately presented evidence of German plans regarding European Jews. Western politicians, and even representatives of Jewish organizations in the West, simply could not believe that Germany, such a cultured and civilized nation, completely gave in to its Fuhrer's mad plans.

JAN KARSKI, BORN JAN ROMUALD KOZIELEWSKI, did not give up and tirelessly gave testimony on the truth. Arrested and tortured by the Gestapo, freed by soldiers of the Polish Underground State, he twice found his way to the Warsaw Ghetto, and then, wearing a Ukrainian guard's uniform, entered a transition camp from which the Germans transported Jews to death camps. He was called "the emissary from hell," but he used to say he was "the emissary of the unfinished mission." Up until the end of his life, at meetings across the USA, Israel, and Poland, he talked about the mass extermination of Jews and his attempts to make the world aware of this tragedy and put an end to it.

PGZ
POLSKA GRUPA ZBROJENIOWA

CONCENTRATION

CAMP LIBERATORS

The order of German leaders was terrifying: "When American forces approach the camp, kill all Jewish women held there." SS officers were ready to fulfil this criminal order.

The women were squeezed in locked barracks, and barrels full of petrol were placed around.

If it had not been for a perfect action carried out by Polish partisans led by Antoni "Bohun" Szacki, the camp would have turned into an inferno.

FORMER SS CAMP GUARD

Antoni Szacki

The action at the Holysov concentration camp was quick as lightning and after a short firefight only two Poles were wounded and the camp was captured.

FROM THE VERY BEGINNING OF THE WAR, the leadership of the National Armed Forces (NAF), one of the biggest Polish underground organizations, were of the opinion that Poland simultaneously fought two enemies – Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. They were right to predict that when the war against the Third Reich was over, Poland would have to fight hard to remain an independent, democratic state. That was the reason why NAF actively fought communists who planned to introduce a regime controlled from Moscow into Poland after the war. Soviet agents and informers were eliminated, partisan units were broken up, and Soviet secret agents who were to organize a home front for the approaching Red Army were seized. Obviously the Soviet NKVD noticed these anti-Communist activities and after communists took control in Poland it meant only one thing – repressions and death of NAF soldiers. That was why NAF leadership decided to withdraw as many soldiers as possible from Poland in order to join the Polish Armed Forces in the West and fight the Germans alongside the Allies in the West.

THE NAF leadership took a seemingly crazy decision – they entered into a tactical alliance with the Germans. The Nazis who made all possible efforts to stop the Red Army on its way to Berlin agreed to make a deal. They let the Świętokrzyska Brigade, a partisan NAF unit led by Bohun, withdraw to their rear. In return they expected assistance in fighting the Soviets. Bohun knew such a fight was pointless as no one and nothing could stop the Soviet march to the West. Pressed by the Germans to fulfil conditions of the deal, Bohun hedged his bets. He said he did not have enough weapons, that his soldiers were exhausted and he needed more time. A suicidal death alongside an enemy was not his aim; rather, he wanted to save his people and move to territories liberated by Americans, so he continued his march to the West.

IN MAY 1945 his brigade arrived close to Plzeň, in today's Czech Republic. They wanted to move to the American side of the front and were getting closer and closer by the day. It was then when Bohun's soldiers found out there was a nazi concentration camp for women not far from their location. The order was clear – take the camp! The crew of the Holysov concentration camp, busy dining, were taken completely by surprise with the partisans' attack. The action was quick as lighting and after a short firefight only two Poles were wounded and the camp was captured. 200 SS officers and 15 guards were taken prisoner. Around 700 women were liberated. Thanks to this unprompted operation of the partisans, the female prisoners were not burned alive and the addition of another inhumane event from the Holocaust was avoided.

AROUND 700 WOMEN WERE LIBERATED.

The Świętokrzyska Brigade. 1945

Female prisoners

5 FAR FROM HOME, THEY FOUGHT FOR POLAND

PGZ
POLSKA GRUPA ZBROJENIOWA

ILL. RAFAŁ ROSKOWIŃSKI

5 FAR FROM HOME, THEY FOUGHT FOR POLAND

Defeat in the defensive war of 1939 did not mean the end of the fight for the Poles. Trusting that victory over the Third Reich would eventually be achieved, the Poles did not drop their weapons and fought alongside Allied armies across all fronts of the war. They fought in France, on the Eastern Front, and in North Africa. They defended Norway and Great Britain, took part in the Italian campaign, and after landing in Normandy helped liberate Western Europe. Unfortunately, most of them did not return home after the war. Their fatherland, ruled by communists, was not the independent state for which they shed blood in the conflict that lasted six years.

The first agreement to create Polish units in France was signed by both governments as early as September 9, 1939. While Poland continued to wage its defensive war, the Poles who lived in France and in the Benelux countries volunteered to be a part of newly created Polish units. They were soon joined by Polish soldiers who had evacuated to Romania. Even though they had been interned there, they fled from POW camps in large numbers and made their way to France to continue the fight. Thanks to the signed agreement, in spring 1940 four infantry divisions and an armored cavalry division were created. Polish airmen also augmented the air force – around 7,000 Polish pilots served alongside their French Allies. When Germany attacked France in June 1940, around 85,000 Polish troops were mobilized.

POLAND IS WHERE POLISH SOLDIERS ARE

Polish soldiers took part in all important military operations against the Third Reich. In 1940 they fought in Norway and later in the defense of France. Polish sailors and vessels participated in the war in the Atlantic. In total, 27 Polish warships protected convoys coming from the United States and Canada with supplies for the British Isles, and also patrolled the Mediterranean. The crew of the “Piorun” destroyer was the first vessel to locate the German battleship “Bismarck.” Even though Bismarck was much bigger and much better armed, Piorun kept exchanging fire with her and allowed other Allied warships maneuver into a position to fire torpedoes and finally sink her.

Polish pilots who participated in the Battle of Britain during WWII also made history. Out of all pilots who fought in the British sky, they only made up five percent. However, due to good training and tremendous courage in the air, they downed 12 percent of all German aircraft destroyed by the Allies. No. 303 Polish Squadron had roughly 60 victories – the best score of any individual squadron during the Battle of Britain.

The Poles were also present during the invasion of France in 1944 and later fights along the Western Front. On “D” Day, Polish warships secured landings of the Allied forces in Normandy beaches and once beachheads were established, land forces were sent. They played a key role in one of the most important battles of this campaign, the Battle of Falaise. In August 1944, in the neighborhood of Falaise, Allied forces managed to encircle almost 100,000 Germans. There was a missing gap of several kilometers to fully encircle the Germans, and the Polish troops were sent in to close the pocket. They withstood the push of prevailing enemy forces until the main Allied force arrived. After the battle, General Bernard Law Montgomery, who commanded

AFTER GERMANY INVADED THE SOVIET UNION IN JUNE 1941, THE POLES FACED A MORAL DILEMMA.

the 21st Army Group, wrote, “Under Falaise we locked the Germans like they were in a bottle, and the Polish Armored Division was the cork in this bottle.” The Polish Armored Division General Montgomery mentioned fought in three great operations of WWII: the 1939 Polish Defensive War, in 1940 in France, and later on the Western Front during 1944 and 1945. Throughout this entire time, the division was commanded by the same officer, General Stanisław Maczek, and it never lost a battle. After the victory at Falaise, soldiers took part in the liberation of the Netherlands and Belgium.

THEY FLED THE SOVIET UNION TO FIGHT FOR POLAND

The biggest unit of the Polish Armed Forces that fought at the Western Allies’ side was the 2nd Corps, commanded by General Władysław Anders. At the end of the war it was around 100,000 soldiers strong. The story of the unit, which in 1944 achieved glory in Italy – seizing the Monte Cassino Abbey and liberating Ancona and Bologna, explicitly shows the difficult and dramatic history of Poland in those times.

After Germany invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941, the Poles faced a moral dilemma. Suddenly a country that together with Nazi Germany attacked Poland was supposed to become an ally in the war. A huge part of Poland was occupied by the Soviet Union and the Polish population was persecuted; around one million Poles were sent to labor camps. France and Britain, who had never experienced anything like that, unhesitatingly invited Joseph Stalin to join the anti-German coalition. For the West, having an ally like the Soviet Union was very beneficial – huge territory, numerous Red Army soldiers, inexhaustible supplies of natural resources – everything that was necessary to continue the war with the Third Reich and win. Allied leaders convinced the Polish government that defeating Germany was a priority and all other matters were of secondary importance. In the name of the “greater good,” Poland agreed.

Poland and the Soviet Union made an agreement to create Polish units in the East. Moscow declared they would release the Poles kept in prisons and labor camps and help establish the Polish Army. General Władysław Anders, who was earlier released from a Soviet prison where he had been tortured, became the leader of the newly created forces. Despite promises the Soviet Union made, the whole process of releasing The Poles from camps and prisons was very slow. There were also other difficulties – the Poles were left alone, with no assistance, and had to travel long distances to get to recruitment points. Supplies for Polish troops also left much to be desired. There was scarcity of everything – uniforms, weapons, vehicles, food, and medicine. As the number of people was growing and the leadership faced more and more organizational problems, it was decided Polish troops would leave the territory of the Soviet Union and join Western Allies. A memorandum was negotiated with a plan to have recently formed units and civilians, altogether numbering approximately 120,000, cross the border into British-controlled Iran.

Thanks to the British support in the Middle East, the whole process of forming units was completed. In 1943, the 2nd Polish Corps was transported to Italy. Polish soldiers took part in all battles of the Italian Campaign, during which they seized the Monte Cassino Abbey, a key point of the German Gustav Line, and liberated Ancona and Bologna.

A CRIME THAT CANNOT BE FORGOTTEN

The issue that had the greatest impact on Polish-Soviet relations during WWII was the questionable fate of a few thousand Polish officers who were taken prisoner by he Red Army in 1939 and went missing. Polish leadership enquired about those soldiers on numerous occasions, but every time the Soviets claimed to have no information about them. It was becoming more and more likely that they had been murdered.

A breakthrough in the case came in April 1943. The Germans informed the Poles they had found nameless mass graves of Polish officers killed by NKVD, the Soviet secret police, in western Russian territory. The Polish government demanded explanation from the Soviet Union, but the Soviets lied again saying the crime was committed by the Germans who took control over Soviet POW camps. Moscow argued it was a German provocation intended to divide the anti-German coalition. All evidence, however, showed the crime had been committed at the hands of the Soviets in spring 1940. After the war it was established that at Stalin’s order over 21,000 people, including 10,000 army and police officers, were murdered. In 1990, Moscow finally admitted Russia was responsible for these atrocities. Unfortunately, Putin’s Russia returned to the untrue narration on German responsibility and Polish historians again have no access to Russian archives. The struggle to finally uncover the truth continues.

Poland and the Soviet Union made an agree-ment to create Polish units in the East.

Western Allies again pressed the Polish government to focus primarily on waging war, but it could not ignore what had happened to its citizens, and officially broke diplomatic relations with the USSR. Even though both states remained members of the anti-German coalition until the end of the war, relations were very cold. The Poles began to use the expression “the ally of our allies” to express their mistrust towards the Soviet Union. After the breakthrough in the Eastern Front, Joseph Stalin completely ignored the opinions of the Polish government in exile. According to his plan, Poland was to become a part of the Communist Bloc in Central Europe. In order to implement it, Stalin formed special units and organizations that consolidated power across Poland after the country’s liberation from German occupation. That system was accepted by western allies during the Yalta conference and lasted until the democratic transformation in 1989.

PGZ
POLSKA GRUPA ZBROJENIOWA

The regiment banner over the ruins of the abbey

The FLAG on Monte Cassino

The Poles paid dearly for the victory.

Abbey – the last bastion

Kazimierz Gurbiel

“THE RED POPPIES ON MONTE CASSINO drank Polish blood instead of dew” – these are the words of one of the most well-known military songs of WWII. It tells the story of Polish troops who fought alongside the Allies to capture the famous hill in central Italy. According to Polish tradition, you should never dance to this song, out of respect, and to honor the ones who fought and died for their country in the faraway land.

IN 1943, Allied troops landed in Sicily and started marching north, towards Rome. The weakness of the Italian ally and its later surrender forced Germany to send elite Wehrmacht troops to the Italian Peninsula. Their task was to stop the anti-Hitler coalition, which included also the Polish II Corps divisions commanded by Gen Władysław Anders.

IN JANUARY 1944, Allies had already taken the whole southern part of Italy. They were preparing to capture Rome. The last bastion on the way to the Eternal City was the so-called Gustav Line, a series of fortifications spread across the narrowest part of the Italian Peninsula. The mountainous region, full of ravines and rapid rivers, cut with only a few narrow roads, was ideal for organizing defense. After unsuccessful attempts to go around the main fortifications, the Allies’ leadership decided to attack along the road running through the town of Cassino. At a nearby hill was an abbey which would enter the pages of WWII history as the place of one of the fiercest battles of the war. German defenders compared it later to the battles fought at Stalingrad.

FOR FOUR MONTHS, Allied troops made unsuccessful attempts to seize fortified hills, which, just like a bottle cork, blocked access to the valley running between them. German defense was excellently prepared and the attacking Allies suffered great losses of over 54,000 killed and wounded troops. In April, a plan of frontal assault on German fortifications was developed. The main force that was to directly attack the positions on Monte Cassino were the Polish II Corps divisions.

BATTLEFIELD CONDITIONS WERE TERRIBLE. Months of combat transformed the way leading up to German bunkers into a desert without any buildings, trees, bigger rocks. Artillery fire and air raids turned the place into a pile of rubble where it was impossible to hide from enemy fire. The whole place was sown with mines. The command wanted to keep the exact direction of attack secret from the Germans, so it was forbidden to patrol the terrain before the assault. Polish soldiers had to climb up the slope completely exposed, with hardly any knowledge of the area, straight into entrenched enemy positions.

BATTLES were waged at each and every bunker separately. Troops fought eye to eye, sometimes even hand to hand. After six days of excruciating effort, the attackers managed to drive the Germans from their positions. The first to reach the peak was the Polish patrol commanded by 2nd Lt Kazimierz Gurbiel. He took the last 16 German soldiers into captivity and raised the regiment banner and the Polish flag over the ruins of the abbey.

THE POLES paid dearly for the victory. They lost 924 troops, and almost 3,000 were wounded. The leadership was aware that the task given to the Polish divisions was almost impossible to execute. Therefore, before the battle, they ordered a cemetery for 3,500 bodies to be prepared. After the defeat at the Cassino heights, the Germans withdrew from the Gustav Line to positions located further north. The way to Rome was open.

PGZ
POLSKA GRUPA ZBROJENIOWA

COBRA Bites Hard

Witold Urbanowicz

JUST LIKE THOUSANDS OF HIS COMPATRIOTS, he wanted to fight for Poland on every front, wherever the soldier's life threw him. No. 303 Polish Fighter Squadron, which he commanded during the Battle of Britain, was the most effective unit in the Royal Air Force (RAF). When his superiors decided he was too old to fly a fighter, he changed colors and traveled to the Far East to fight the Japanese. After all, killing the enemy was top priority for Maj Witold Urbanowicz.

FOR THE FAMOUS US "FLYING TIGERS" stationed in the Kunming Airfield in the capital of the Chinese Province of Yunan, October 11, 1943 started a bit differently. A passenger stepped onto the runway from a DC-3, wearing a steel-blue uniform they had never seen before. They were also unable to recognize the cap badge on his service hat, an eagle between two wings. What they did recognize was the RAF emblem above the left pocket of his jacket. Speaking with a strange accent, he requested to be taken to General Claire Lee Chennault's headquarters. When he reported to the Commander of the 14th Air Force, the general bluntly asked: "Well, what should I do with you?" Urbanowicz replied "Just give me an aircraft and I will find something to do with it here." This is how the Polish fighter ace started his service with the "Flying Tigers."

URBANOWICZ was a hero of the Battle of Britain in 1940. In its decisive phase, he commanded No. 303 Polish Fighter Squadron, which ended up being famous for its effectiveness. He personally shot down 15 German aircraft. During dog fights, he was so tenacious that the Polish and British pilots nicknamed him "Cobra." The nickname, however, also reflected another feature of his – a tendency to argue with superiors. It is claimed that this was the reason he had to hand over command of the Squadron on October 20, 1940. Official justification stated he was exhausted. He returned to his beloved flying but his joy did not last long. The following June, at the age of 33, he was dismissed from battle flights due to his age. He was promoted to major and offered an honorable job in the Polish embassy in Washington, DC. For Cobra it was a nightmare. As a military attaché in Washington, he was more interested in meeting American pilots and veterans of the American Volunteer Group in the Far East (Flying Tigers). They got him an official invitation from General Chennault to RAF's 14th Air Force.

THE US COMMANDER never regretted receiving Cobra and giving him one of his Curtiss P-40 aircraft. In total, between October and the end of December 1943, Maj Urbanowicz destroyed 11 Japanese fighters, received the US Air Medal, and the Chinese Medal of Two Stars. During one operation he saved his American colleague, Maj Richardson, by shooting two Japanese "Zeros" that were pursuing Richardson's aircraft. For this he received a thank you letter from General Henry "Hap" Arnold.

YEARS LATER, General Urbanowicz admitted he had been skeptical about the stories of contempt Japanese pilots had for death. This skepticism was gone after the first fight he had with Japanese pilots. He recalled that "when the first Japanese pilot I encountered came from behind, fighting like a wounded lion, and trying to chop the tail off my plane with his propeller, which would obviously kill him in the process, I became more careful. Different rules of fighting applied here." Fortunately, on that particular day the kamikaze met his match, and Cobra managed to shoot him down.

AN INVENTION THAT SAVED THOUSANDS

A disc attached to a long stick, headphones, and a backpack with a measuring instrument inside – anyone even remotely interested in World War II history knows what a typical mine detector looks like. However, they might not know it is a Polish invention.

Józef Kosacki

"NOW THIS IS NOT THE END, IT IS NOT EVEN THE BEGINNING OF THE END. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning" – this is what Winston Churchill said about the battle of El-Alamein. In the fall of 1942, the 8th Army, led by Marshall Bernard Montgomery, defeated German Afrika Korps supported by the Italians. Western historians claim that it was one of the turning points of WWII. This spectacular triumph may not have happened if it had not been for two Polish soldiers and the inconspicuous device they built – the Polish Mine Detector.

THE STORY BEGAN IN APRIL 1942, when a company led by a 32-year-old captain, Stanisław Górski, trained near Arbroath, Scotland. When soldiers entered the beach, mines hidden in the sand exploded under their feet. Capt Górski was killed immediately, and his colleague, a 27-year-old corporal, Stanisław Stasiak, was severely injured. Doctors did their best, but the injuries were too serious and he died in hospital that night. The tragic news quickly reached the Polish troops and especially caught the attention of Lt Józef Kosacki. Lt Kosacki was an electrical engineer and a veteran of Warsaw defense battles, then working at the London Military Communications Company. As many others, he was shocked. “Something must be done to prevent such situations in the future,” he thought, and started working on a solution. He decided to return to the idea he had before the war and build a mine detector. Together with Cpl Andrzej Garboś, who was later promoted to an officer rank, he built an instrument that detected metal objects with electromagnetic waves. It consisted of headphones, a backpack measuring device, and a disc with coils attached to a bamboo stick. Once the disc was above a mine, a loud whistling noise could be heard in the headphones.

THEY WORKED FOR MONTHS TO IMPROVE THE DETECTOR and entered it into a contest held by the British Ministry of Supply. One of the tasks in the contest was to use the device to find as many one-pence coins scattered on a lawn as possible. The Polish detector out-performed six British mine detectors. Lt Kosacki did not patent it; he did not create the device for financial gain. His aim was to equip Allied troops with the detector as soon as possible to save lives.

SOLDIERS GETTING READY FOR THE BATTLE OF EL ALAMAIN RECEIVED 500 MINE DETECTORS and were able to make their way through huge mine fields known as the “Devil’s Garden.” The victorious Allied attack that came next ended the war in Northern Africa. Consequently, the popularity of the Polish mine detector spread. The device performed so well that armies all over the world used it, with slight modifications, until the mid-90s. It was even used by US troops in Iraq during Operation Desert Storm.

AFTER WORLD WAR II, the Polish inventors returned to Poland. Lt Kosacki became a scientist and worked at the Nuclear Research Institute, ultimately becoming a professor. Unfortunately, his role in inventing the mine detector was long forgotten, especially with the reign of communism during the Cold War. The communists’ initially hostile, and later reserved attitude towards the Polish army in the West could not be changed even by great achievements that significantly influenced the course of war.

PGZ
POLSKA GRUPA ZBROJENIOWA

Kazimierz
Leski

It was one of the most daring operations of the Home Army intelligence.

MYSTERY OF THE "GERMAN" GENERAL VON HALLMANN

A POLISH OFFICER DISGUISED AS A GERMAN GENERAL acquired plans of the Atlantic Wall, a system of coastal defense structures and fortifications built to defend against the Allied invasion of nazi-occupied Europe. The disguise was so good that he was even reimbursed travel expenses. That is how Polish conspirators contributed to the development of plans for Operation Overlord.

PARIS, THE FALL OF 1943. For the staff of Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt it was another monotonous day full of hard work supervising the construction of fortifications along the western coast of France. The officers, however, did not complain. On the contrary, they felt lucky to stay out of the hell of the Eastern Front. Instead of fighting in Russian mud, they enjoyed their time in the cabarets of Paris, drank wine, and ate hot chestnuts on Place Pigalle. On one particular day, Marshal von Rundstedt expected a visit by one of his veterans, General Julius von Hallmann, an engineer and officer fighting in the south of Ukraine. The distinguished guest was received with honors. As an engineer, General Hallmann was particularly interested in the plans of Atlantic coastal fortifications. Marshal von Rundstedt's staff were very open and willing to share details of the ongoing construction with the guest. As a farewell gift, he was reimbursed expenses incurred while in France, and to comfort him before his return to Russia he received additional 500 Deutsche Marks. It came as quite a surprise when after his departure someone called his parent unit only to find out that they had never heard of General von Hallmann.

GENERAL JULIUS VON HALLMANN NEVER EXISTED, and the man who visited Marshal von Rundstedt was Col Kazimierz Leski, a seasoned Polish intelligence officer and member of the Home Army. He was the head of the "666" Cell, Division II (intelligence and counter-intelligence) of the Home Army Headquarters. The unit's task was to create the shortest trafficking channel to France and later to England through Berlin. After first attempts to blaze the trail, Col Leski decided that the easiest way to travel across Germany would be in disguise as German soldiers: "So, I decided to enlist my colleagues and myself in the German Army. All that we actually needed was detailed information regarding the set of papers that German soldiers used while travelling. Our intelligence gathered that information, and to be absolutely sure, Warsaw pickpockets supported us (of course ideologically) with some sets of original papers they had stolen from German soldiers arriving at Warsaw railway stations." Thus, the Home Army agents, disguised as German officers, started travelling by train to German-occupied Europe. Besides General Hallmann, Col Leski also impersonated another General, Karl Leopold Jansen, who had wide contacts among military men in Spain. Thanks to this, the ace of Polish intelligence created a courier route and trafficking channel across the territory of Spain.

IN JULY AND AUGUST 1944, Col Leski was in Warsaw. Even though he was an intelligence officer without a combat assignment, he took an active part in the Warsaw Uprising that broke out on August 1. For his bravery he was awarded the War Order of Virtuti Militari and three times the Cross of Valor. After the war, like many other Home Army soldiers, he was imprisoned and repressed by communist authorities, but eventually he managed to return to his beloved profession of ship engineering.

3 9 1 2

Marian Rejewski together with a group of cryptanalysts cracked the Enigma, a German rotor cipher machine.

Marian Rejewski

MATHEMATICIANS Who Saved Millions

THEIR DISCOVERY enabled the Allies to track the movement of German forces, end the war sooner, and save millions of lives.

A YOUNG MAN is looking at us from a black and white photo. A jacket, a tie, a serious expression on his face, short hair, and round glasses. First impression? He must be a clerk, maybe a scientist, and certainly a bookworm. No one would guess that this inconspicuous guy had a huge impact on the course of World War II.

IN THE MID-1920S, the German military began coding their messages using the Enigma. The device consisted of a 26-key keyboard and a set of rotors. Whenever a letter key on the keyboard was pressed, a rotor turned, an electric circuit was closed, and the letter was replaced with a different one. Of course, it did not happen on a "one-to-one" basis. The rotors kept moving, and each letter could be substituted with a different letter each time it was used (e.g. an "a" could be replaced with a "z" and later with an "m"). The key to deciphering the code was determining the initial setting of the rotors, and the Germans changed the setting every day.

COUNTERINTELLIGENCE SPECIALISTS from the Polish General Staff knew linguists would not be able to break the code. They needed mathematicians, and Capt Ciężki from the Polish Cipher Bureau decided to look for the most talented mathematicians at the Poznań University. Three young people were recruited: Marian Rejewski, Jerzy Różycki, and Henryk Zygalski. In 1932 they broke the Enigma code, and shortly after they even built a replica of the machine. The Germans were unaware of the Poles' success, but nevertheless kept improving their security measures. Polish mathematicians did not fall behind the German technology and built "Rejewski's Bombe," a special deciphering machine. It was a prototype later used and developed by a genius British mathematician, Alan Turing.

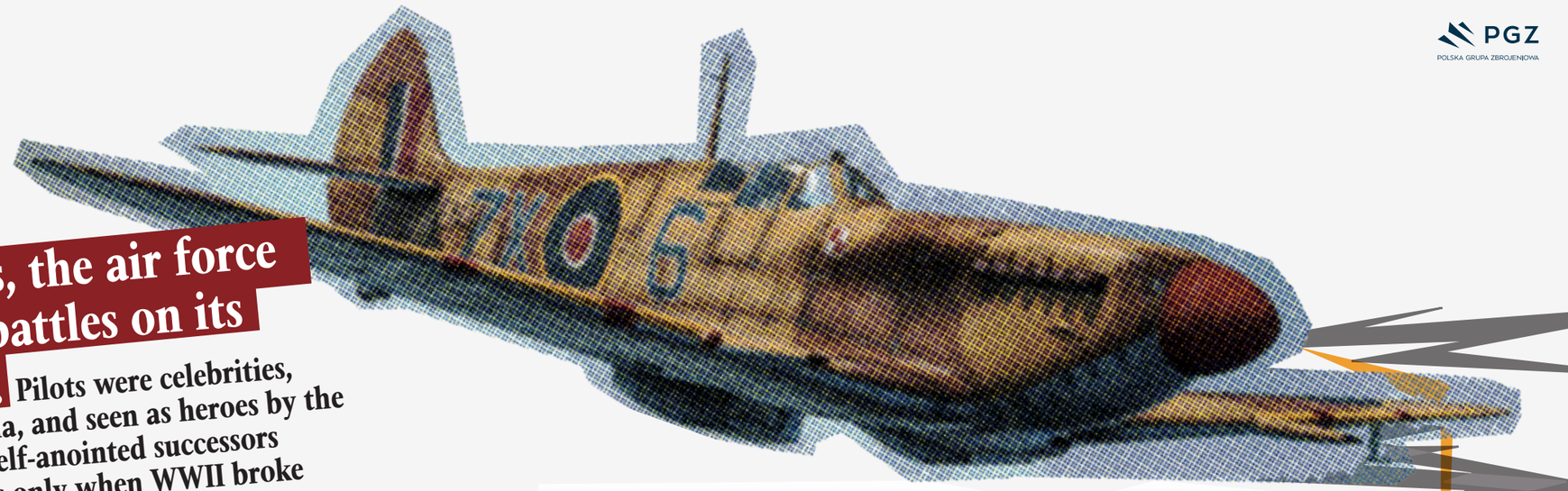
IN JULY 1939, mathematicians from the Polish Cipher Bureau shared their knowledge about Enigma with the British and the French. After the war broke out, the cryptanalysts were evacuated to Romania, then to France, and finally to Britain where they kept working on cracking German codes. Breaking the Enigma code enabled the Allies to track movement of German forces. Today historians agree that due to their efforts, the war lasted two or three years less than anticipated. As a consequence, millions of human lives were saved.

REJEWSKI ENDED HIS MILITARY CAREER IN THE POLISH ARMED FORCES IN THE WEST AS A LIEUTENANT. In 1946 he returned to Poland and worked as a clerk in a factory in Bydgoszcz. He could not talk to his friends about what he had done during the war as it was highly classified. He finally revealed the truth in 1967. At that time, the Polish role in the breaking of the Enigma code was marginalized and often not even mentioned.

Historians attributed success to British cryptanalysts from Bletchley Park. This false image was also reinforced by film makers and their work, e.g. the Hollywood production "Enigma" with Dougray Scott and Kate Winslet.

FORTUNATELY, THIS TENDENCY IS SLOWLY CHANGING. The merits of Marian Rejewski were appreciated by the Americans who posthumously awarded him with the Knowlton Award, recognizing individuals who have contributed significantly to the promotion of Military Intelligence.

PGZ
POLSKA GRUPA ZBROJENIOWA



Stanisław Skalski

AIR KNIGHT

For decades, the air force waged air battles on its own terms. Pilots were celebrities, loved by the media, and seen as heroes by the public; just like self-anointed successors of knights. It was only when WWII broke out that this romantic period in the history of aviation ended. An aircraft quickly became a tool of destruction, just like any other weapon.

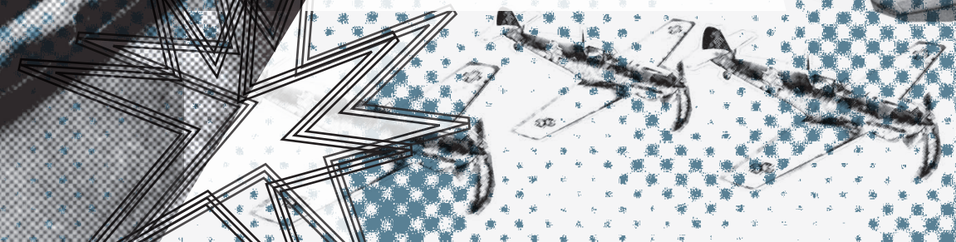
THEY JUMPED TO THEIR FEET hearing the alarm as a German aircraft was approaching. Pilots on duty quickly rushed to their fighters. 2nd Lt Stanisław Skalski was among the three pilots who reached their aircraft first. He jumped into his machine, immediately took off, and started chasing a German Dornier reconnaissance aircraft. However, the Dornier was far too fast for him, so Skalski decided to head back to the airfield.

ON HIS WAY BACK, Skalski spotted a German Henschel reconnaissance plane. A formation of Polish fighters rushed towards the German aircraft and caught it easily. The German machine tried to fight, but alone had no chance. A series of bullets shot from a Polish fighter hit the engine which belched thick smoke. The plane started descending and the German pilot attempted to somehow land smoothly. Despite his efforts, the plane crashed with such force it burrowed into the ground and flipped over.

SEEING THE CRASH LANDING, Skalski took quick action – he landed on a nearby meadow and ran to the wrecked German aircraft. Both pilots were still alive, but severely wounded. He pulled them out of the wreck, dressed their wounds, and called an ambulance to take them to the field hospital. As soon as they were safeguarded, Skalski started his fighter and took off. He returned to his home airfield and delivered maps that he had taken from the German aircraft. All this happened on September 1, 1939, the first day of WWII.

OFFERING HIS AID TO THE CREW of the shot down plane, 2nd Lt Skalski followed the best traditions of air combat dating back to the times of WWI. It soon turned out the second war was a lot different than the first. Treatment of foes turned out to be much more brutal and such behavior between Allied and German pilots was extremely rare. Years later Stanisław Skalski met both German pilots whom he had rescued back in 1939. They thanked him for his help and for saving their lives.

THAT WAS THE FIRST, but not last, military operation in which Stanisław Skalski participated. During Poland's defensive war of 1939, Skalski shot down five aircraft and damaged one. At that time Skalski became the first Allied fighter ace of WWII. However, this was only the beginning of his war experience. Along with hundreds of other Polish pilots, Skalski sacrificed a lot for Poland during the war. He fought in British fighters during the Battle of Britain, flew in North Africa, and covered the Allied landing in Normandy. According to official lists, he was credited 18 certain victories, two probable, two shot downs carried out together with other pilots, and four damaged aircraft. He was the most effective Polish fighter ace of WWII.



Krystyna
Skarbek
Churchill's Favorite AGENT

The life of Krystyna Skarbek and her intelligence work is still shrouded in mystery.

Super Spy

the secret

PGZ
POLSKA GRUPA ZBROJENIOWA

THE BOSS
WINSTON CHURCHILL

"I AM A BRITISH AGENT, Marshal Montgomery's niece. You must immediately free our people. The underground is planning to kill you and I am the only one who can stop it. You can still make some money on it. You will get two million pounds." – these were the words uttered to a Gestapo officer by a beautiful, young woman who stormed into his office. He was stunned. However, the woman sounded so convincing that he actually agreed to take her offer. He freed the imprisoned members of the French Resistance and got a fortune in return. The author and executor of this plan was Krystyna Skarbek, whom the British Prime Minister Winston Churchill called his favorite agent.

SHE CAME FROM A WEALTHY FAMILY, but she was not a typical girl "from a good home." She rode a horse, climbed, participated in beauty pageants. Once, while on vacation in the mountains, she met a group of smugglers. She helped them transport alcohol and cigarettes across the border. Not for money, but for a rush of adrenaline.

WHEN WWII BROKE OUT, Krystyna was in Africa, where she lived with her second husband, Poland's consul general in Ethiopia. She decided to sail to Great Britain and volunteered to work for the secret services. She was the first woman in the history of British intelligence who finished a very demanding training to become a secret service agent. She was particularly good at shooting and assassination with rope or knife.

SHE WAS SENT TO BUDAPEST as Christine Granville and managed to get across the green border into nazi-occupied Poland three times. She collected information on the movement of German troops, crimes committed in Poland and war plans of the Third Reich. One of her greatest achievements was obtaining the plans of Germany's invasion on the Soviet Union, known as Operation Barbarossa.

THE GERMAN counter-intelligence eventually picked up her trail and arrested her. During the investigation, Krystyna Skarbek bit her tongue until it bled, feigning symptoms of advanced tuberculosis. The Germans fell for her trick and she was released. Krystyna fled to Great Britain where she immediately returned to service. She started work in the Middle East. After the war in Africa ended, she came back to Europe to remain in the center of events. She completed parachute training and was dropped into France to join an SOE (Special Operations Executive) team. As a member of the French Resistance she took part in actions of blowing up bridges, railway tracks and ammunition depots. She was also the author and executor of the plan to buy members of the French Resistance out of prison.

AFTER THE WAR she worked as a maid, a telephonist, a shop assistant at Harrods, and a liner stewardess. During one of the cruises she met Ian Fleming, the author of James Bond novels. Their affair lasted for a year, and the writer, fascinated with Krystyna, is believed to have based some of his female characters on her (Vesper Lynd from Casino Royale, among others).

THE LIFE OF KRYSTYNA SKARBEK and her intelligence work is still shrouded in mystery. Some of the files regarding her service are still classified. Also her death remains open to speculation. She was stabbed by her friend after she had turned down his marriage proposal. The puzzling thing is that his trial was unusually quick, as was the execution of his death sentence. It seems as if someone wanted to close the case fast, avoiding doubt and inconvenient questions.

PGZ
POLSKA GRUPA ZBROJENIOWA

Operation Market Garden was the largest airborne operation of WWII.

During this operation, Capt Ludwik Zwolański swam twice across the Rhine to deliver messages. His British colleagues, the "Red Devils," said he must have had a pact with the devil to successfully do that.

He replied: "Remember, I am a Polish soldier."

Ludwik Zwolański

A DEVILISH POLISH LIAISON

MARSHAL BERNARD LAW MONTGOMERY WAS THE MASTERMIND BEHIND OPERATION MARKET GARDEN. According to him, the operation should have brought an end to the war in 1944. Monty threw his best airborne troops to Dutch river crossings to prepare the way for tanks heading deep into the Third Reich. Polish troops from the 1st Independent Parachute Brigade, under General Stanisław Sosabowski, fought alongside British and American paratroopers. After the first few days of the operation, it was apparent Monty's plan was too optimistic. This was especially true for the Battle of Arnhem.

MOST OF THE POLISH BRIGADE JOINED THE FIGHT FOR ARNHEM BRIDGES ON THE FOURTH DAY OF THE BATTLE ("D+4"), ON SEPTEMBER 21, 1944. The Brigade's Liaison Unit and Anti-Tank Artillery Squadron had been fighting from the very beginning of the operation in the Netherlands. The Polish brigade was supposed to be in the fight on the second day of the battle ("D+2"), but there was thick fog at the English airports from which they were to depart. Flights carting Polish troops were cancelled twice.

BRITISH PARATROOPERS WERE STRUGGLING AT ARNHEM. The Poles would be dropped in to provide reinforcement. Originally, the Poles were scheduled to drop in around 2 km south of Arnhem, on the other side of the river; but on September 21 the Germans managed to cut off an Allied bridgehead at Arnhem, which left the Brits holding only the south-western part of Oosterbeek-Heveadorp. Because of this, a new drop zone was marked for the Polish Brigade in vicinity of Drie, about 6 km west from the previous one. After they landed, the Poles immediately headed towards the bank of the Lek, a tributary of the Rhine. There they discovered that the opposite bank was dominated by the enemy and there was no way across.

GENERAL SOSABOWSKI AND HIS STAFF WERE FACED WITH A DIFFICULT DILEMMA of how to reinforce the British 1st Airborne Division which had sustained heavy casualties. Around 10:30 p.m. General Sosabowski's men brought him a strange-looking individual. The man wore only shorts, had a net tied around his neck, was painted with camouflage paint from head to toe, and held a knife and a pistol in his hands. The general finally recognized one of his officers, Capt Ludwik Zwolański, who was a liaison and had been fighting together with the British from the very first days of the battle. What Capt Zwolański had done impressed even the most experienced paratroopers. To deliver orders from Major-General Robert Urquhart, he had swam across the Rhine beneath heavy German machinegun fire. The order read: "The Brits will clean up a part of the bank, the Brigade is expected to cross the river, boats will be delivered." General Sosabowski promised he would do his best to follow the order. Totally exhausted, Capt Zwolański saluted and started his swim back across the river! This heroic action, from which Zwolański came out alive and unharmed, led the "Red Devils" to the conclusion that this Polish soldier must have made a deal with the devil himself.

PGZ
POLSKA GRUPA ZBROJENIOWA

6 THE WAR WAS OVER, BUT THE FIGHT CONTINUED

ILL. RAFAŁ ROSKOWIŃSKI

PGZ
POLSKA GRUPA ZBROJENIOWA

6 THE WAR WAS OVER, BUT THE FIGHT CONTINUED

The defeat of the Third Reich and liberation of Poland from the German occupation did not bring freedom to the Poles. The country fell into the Soviet zone of influence and under a communist government controlled by Moscow. Many Poles did not agree with the new government and continued the fight for a fully independent and democratic fatherland. In Poland, they are called "the cursed soldiers" – the communists denied them not only the right to live, but also to die with dignity and to be remembered. Propaganda called them "bandits" and "nazis." Persecuted, tortured, hunted down, and murdered in prisons, they were to be erased from the pages of history.

Winston Churchill, the Prime Minister of Great Britain at the time, once said he would make a deal with the devil to defeat Adolf Hitler. Those words came true in 1941, after the German-Soviet war had broken out and the Soviet Union joined the anti-German coalition. No one understood the words of the British Prime Minister better than the Poles. They fought the Bolshevik Russians in the 1920 war, Polish minority populations were oppressed within the Soviet Union, and the Soviets murdered Polish POWs in 1939. All that left the Poles no doubt as to what the real intentions of the Soviets were. For the Soviet Union, defeating the Third Reich was only a means to achieve their main objective – invade Eastern and Central Europe and install communist regimes throughout the region.

The Polish government understood that the Western Allies had to cooperate with the Soviet Union and knew victory with Germany was of the utmost importance. Throughout the whole period of the Alliance's existence, the Poles referred to the Soviet Union as "the ally of our allies." It meant unresolved issues between Warsaw and Moscow were temporarily placed aside in order to defeat the threat from the Third Reich. The Poles hoped that after Germany's defeat all Allies would enter into negotiations and together decide on the shape of the post-war world. That was not the case. During the Yalta conference, leaders of the USA, Great Britain and the Soviet Union agreed on their respective spheres of influence within Europe, but they did this without asking the countries they referred to. Poland became a part of the Communist Bloc. Although the Iron Curtain appeared and the cooperation that existed during the war vanished, western societies did not want another war. The Iron Curtain divided the world for the next 45 years.

PATRIOTS VS. COMMUNISTS

Communists had been getting ready to take over leadership positions in Poland much earlier. Soon after the breakthrough on the Eastern Front, when it became clear that victory over Germany was imminent, the Soviets began activities to secure their future. They secretly sent political officers to Germany-occupied Poland, with a task to lay the foundation for the communist party. Although their share in the fight with the Germans was inconsiderable, after Poland was seized by the Red Army under a false pretense of bringing liberation, they were to be the living proof of Polish communists' engagement in the war, and set conditions for taking over power in Poland.

The Polish Underground State, loyal to the Polish government-in-exile in London, could not idly stand by as communists consolidated power. Leadership of the government-in-exile knew communists did not have true support within Poland and the supposed internal struggle was merely Soviet propaganda. The Polish Resistance Movement took a

IN ORDER TO COMBAT THE UNDERGROUND STATE, COMMUNISTS CREATED A 25-THOUSAND-STRONG PUBLIC SECURITY OFFICE.

number of actions against Soviet-sponsored organizations. The resistance targeted Soviet partisans, informants, and communist activists. They also began an information campaign to counter the Soviet narrative, highlight their real intentions, and shield the Polish population from Soviet propaganda.

LIBERATION OR "LIBERATION"?

In January 1944, while chasing the retreating Germans, the Red Army crossed the pre-war border with Poland and entered areas where Polish independence underground groups were active. Pursuant to the Allied commitment, the Polish Home Army fought alongside the Red Army to defeat a common enemy. The Soviets, with Poland's support, successfully pushed the Germans to the west. They dominated the front so much that they began suppressing underground organizations faithful to the Polish government-in-exile. Additionally, ordinary soldiers were forced to join the Red Army under the false pretense they would enjoy freedom after the conflict ended. It quickly turned out to be a lie.
Retaliation against the Polish Home Army and independence underground soldiers started immediately. Troops of the Soviet NKVD arrested and murdered Polish soldiers and intimidated local residents who supported them. Private soldiers were sometimes forced to join the ranks of Polish units attached to the Red Army. They were lured with a promise that if they fought together with the Russians against the German occupant, they would redeem their "guilt" of belonging to pro-independence, anti-communist organizations. It quickly turned out that it was yet another lie. For the Soviets, they remained a "politically uncertain element" and were still subject to repressions. Naturally, those who served Poland by fighting the communist underground during the war suffered the most. A hunt for Polish patriots started throughout the country.

The Poles engaged in the fight with communists and all those who were hoping for a democratic post-war Poland were in a hopeless situation. They lived in constant fear and were monitored by secret services, arrested, brutally tortured, and forced to generate fake confessions. Many death sentences were executed, and the bodies of murdered people were buried in unknown places. Those brave enough to fight for Polish independence as members of the resistance knew they faced the brutality of the communist regime.

CURSED SOLDIERS FIGHT TO THE END

In order to combat the Underground State, communists created a 25-thousand-strong Public Security Office. The office was supported by the Soviet NKVD with around 35 thousand personnel stationed in Poland, as well as the Polish People's Army and the Red Army with around two million personnel in total. A network of prisons and camps was established across Poland. Parts of thas infrastructure had been earlier utilized by the Germans during the war, only to be seized by the Soviets and used to fight and oppress Polish patriots.

Brutal Soviet methods did not break Polish hopes to regain freedom. A few years after the war, between 120,000 and 180,000 people were members of independence organizations and partisan units, out of whom around 20,000 took up arms. The main goal was to oppose sovietization of the country and relieve the terrorized society. Partisans targeted communist regime officials, activists, and security apparatus informants. They attacked militia stations and Public Security offices; raided prisons and released prisoners; burned public administration offices. The resistance made life difficult for communists. In total, the Polish resistance partisans killed around 13,000 communist soldiers and officials and approximately the same number of non-uniformed communist personnel, such as security apparatus informants, members of the communist party, administration officials. The resistance suffered approximately 9,000 killed and 80,000 arrested. Of those arrested, upwards of 25 % died or were murdered in prison. Communist courts imposed around 5,000 death penalties, half of which were executed.

The terrorized society could not oppose the communist takeover of power. Polish communists, supported by the Red Army and NKVD, started building "new Poland," fully communist and loyal to Moscow. In communist Poland, there was no tolerance for differing political views, and those who went against the grain were targeted. The resistance grew tired and demoralized due to having struggled for so long. Help from outside of Poland never arrived. Many resistance members fled Poland and moved further into Western Europe. Others gave up their anti-communist activities and tried to start new lives under different names. After 1947 there were still around 2,000 armed Polish resistance soldiers. Those individuals were consistently hunted and ultimately killed. The last of the cursed soldiers died fighting in 1963.

Although communists finally defeated the Underground State and took full power in Poland for the next 45 years, they did not manage to erase the memory of the heroic Poles who fought and died in Poland's defense. Today, those cursed soldiers, in Poland referred to as steadfast, are part of the multi-century history of the Polish military. They fought for the highest values – liberty, independence and justice.

Brutal Soviet methods did not break Polish hopes to regain freedom.

PGZ
POLSKA GRUPA ZBROJENIOWA

FOREVER LOYAL TO POLAND

Danuta Siedzik

Danuta
Siedzik

Two convicts are standing in the dark basement of a communist prison

– a 17-year-old medical orderly, nom de guerre "Inka," and a 42-year-old partisan – "Zagończyk." Opposite them, a firing squad. The prosecutor gives an order: "At the traitors of the Polish nation – fire!" The prisoners, tied to wooden stakes, simultaneously shout: "Long live Poland!" They fall to the ground, wounded. The furious officer takes out a gun and finishes the job by shooting them both in the head. This is how the "new, free homeland" was built in Poland after the war.

DANUTA SIEDZIK, KNOWN AS "INKA" IN THE ANTI-COMMUNIST UNDERGROUND, WAS BORN IN EASTERN POLAND. She was only 11 when WWII broke out. After her town was taken by the Red Army, her father was arrested by the NKVD. He was a forester, and people of this profession were always treated with suspicion by the Soviet Security Service. Their knowledge of forests could always be used to organize or support partisan units. Therefore, without any proof of conducting anti-communist activity, Wacław Siedzik was preventively deported to Siberia.

AFTER THE OUTBREAK OF THE GERMAN-SOVIET WAR, Eastern Poland was occupied by the Third Reich. Danuta's mother joined the Home Army and was arrested by the Gestapo in 1942. She underwent brutal interrogations, but refused to cooperate. Several months later she was murdered by the Gestapo. Danuta was 15 at the time, she was still a child.

SHE AND HER SISTER DECIDED TO JOIN THE HOME ARMY. She underwent medical training and started service as a medical orderly. In the course of the ongoing war, the front went through her native town once again and communists regained power in the region in 1944. Together with thousands of other Home Army members, Inka was arrested by the NKVD. A group of anti-communist underground soldiers saved her from being murdered in Soviet prison by rescuing her and other prisoners from a transport convoy. Danuta had nowhere to return to, so she joined the underground group.

SHE WAS A LIAISON AND A MEDIC. Colleagues from the group remember her as always cheerful and very humble. During fights, she offered medical assistance not only to the members of her unit, but also to communists, some of which remembered her humanity and kindness very well.

IN THE SUMMER OF 1946, she took on a very dangerous mission. She was to travel to Gdańsk to collect medical supplies for partisans hiding in the forest. Unfortunately, communists knew about the action (one of the liaisons captured earlier gave away the plans of partisans during interrogations) and set up a trap. Inka was arrested. Beaten and tortured in a Soviet prison, she refused to cooperate. She kept the secrets of the resistance movement until the end.

HER TRIAL WAS A SAD PARODY OF THE JUSTICE SYSTEM. Testimonies forced with torture, fake witnesses, falsified evidence – communists did everything it took to prove her guilt without a twinge of conscience. The case files still hold the only real proof that the prosecution used against Inka – the list of medicines she was sent to collect. Danuta Siedzik was sentenced to death and executed along with another underground member, Feliks "Zagończyk" Selmanowicz.

CONVERSATIONS WITH AN EXECUTIONER

sentenced to death

Why was the Home Army hero doing time with a nazi criminal?

Kazimierz Moczarski

A GLOOMY CELL of a communist prison. Two men are sitting on bunks. One is a Home Army Polish hero, and the other one is a German SS officer responsible for crimes in Germany-occupied Warsaw. In this way communists tried to equalize guilts of people who some time earlier belonged to two opposite camps.

DURING WWII, Kazimierz Moczarski was Chief of the Office for Information and Propaganda in the Polish Home Army. An underground cell subordinate to him informed the Poles about the course of the war and activities of the Polish government in exile. The cell collected evidence of nazi crimes, gathered documents and orders. Therefore, Mr. Moczarski was extremely well informed and had thorough knowledge of the Polish Underground State.

SOON AFTER WARSAW was liberated by the Red Army, Moczarski became a target for the communist secret service. He was arrested in August 1945 and charged with anti-communist activities. The investigation was brutal. In his memoirs he listed 49 types of torture he endured. Despite the tortures, he did not divulge information on his network or collaborate with the communists. The court sentenced him to 10 years in prison.

A COUPLE OF YEARS LATER, it was decided that Moczarski's punishment was not severe enough, and the trial was reinitiated. In the prison interrogation room someone said: "Admit you passed information about communists to your superiors or we will charge you with being a Gestapo agent." Moczarski decided he would not take on the false guilt the communists tried to impose on him, so, curiously, they charged him with cooperation with the nazis.

AGAIN THEY MADE HIS LIFE HELL. He was beaten and humiliated. The same happened to his wife, who was also arrested. For overzealous investigating officers it was still too little. In March 1949, to finally shame the former Home Army officer, they locked him in one cell with SS-Gruppenführer Jürgen Stroop, a nazi criminal responsible for the annihilation of the Jewish Ghetto in Warsaw. They wanted to show both of them that in their eyes they were the same. Moczarski did not break down. He started talking to his cellmate, listening to him, asking him questions. As a pre-war journalist, he wanted to know and try to understand his motivations. Moczarski's experience in documenting nazi crimes urged him to take advantage of the situation. The result of his nine-month stay in prison was his book, entitled "Conversations with the Executioner," one of the world's most important books on the nature of totalitarianism.

JÜRGEN STROOP explained to Moczarski that "an order is an order," that "thinking too intensively kills a man," and "war is the best gate to liberty." He would talk about methodical murdering of Jewish fighters, blind obedience to the nazi leadership, and racial superiority over the Poles and the Jews.

SOON AFTER, both Moczarski and Jürgen Stroop were sentenced to death. Stroop was hanged in the gallows. Mr. Moczarski remarkably avoided his fate. In 1953, the Supreme Court commuted his sentence to life imprisonment, but he was not informed about it and spent two more years on the death row. In 1956, within the so called "Polish thaw" at the end of the Stalinist period, he was retried, pronounced innocent and fully rehabilitated.

EPISODES OF "CONVERSATIONS WITH THE EXECUTIONER" were published in the "Odra" magazine, and finally published as a book in 1977. A complete collection of all episodes waited for publishing until the fall of communism. Before that, censors were very sensitive about references that could in any way suggest why on earth a Home Army hero was doing time together with a nazi criminal. The book has been translated into all European languages and Japanese.

Zygmunt Szendzielarz

UNFORGIVEN

He is a legend of the WWII Polish underground.

Zygmunt "Łupaszka" Szendzielarz made lives of all those who threatened the Poles on the Eastern frontier a total misery. He fought the Germans, the Lithuanians, and the Soviets. Hunted for by everyone, he worked hard to gain respect; even of the deadly enemy.

DURING WWII, THE EASTERN FRONT OF POLAND WAS KNOWN AS "KRESY." This area was taken over by the criminal politics of two totalitarian regimes – the communists and the nazis. The residents of Kresy were in peril. In 1941, the German army chased the Soviets out of Kresy and the SS and Gestapo replaced the Soviet NKVD with their own, equally bloody methods. To make matters worse, Soviet partisans, who did not care at all about the fate of the Polish, Lithuanian, or Belarussian residents, launched a ruthless guerilla war. Not only were Polish underground activists forced to fight the Germans, or Ukrainian and Lithuanian troops that collaborated with them, but also the theoretically allied Soviet units. It was the Soviets who in August 1943 disarmed and murdered the first Polish partisan group that operated near Vilnius, Lithuania. Out of 300 soldiers led by 2nd Lt Antoni Burzyński, the Soviets killed him and 80 of his men. Those who survived the massacre dispersed throughout the area. Right then, in that hopeless situation, an avenger appeared.

THE POLISH HOME ARMY HEADQUARTERS SENT ŁUPASZKA TO GATHER THE DISPERSED SOLDIERS, form them into a fighting force, and immediately begin combat operations against the enemy. Łupaszka did so with lightning speed. Terrified Soviet partisans nicknamed his unit the Death Brigade. "When we met, we immediately and fiercely attacked, and they [the Soviets], usually a bit drunk, panicked and dispersed. Suffering defeat after a defeat, they hated us deeply." – one of Łupaszka's soldiers recalled. In the area around Vilnius, Łupaszka's Death Brigade was not only feared by the Soviets, but also the Germans and collaborating Lithuanians.

IN JANUARY 1944, HIS SELECT TROOP WAS OFFICIALLY NAMED THE HOME ARMY 5TH VILNIUS BRIGADE. Łupaszka ruled with an iron fist and treason was punished with death. His soldiers could always rely on his experience and care even in the hardest situations. In July 1944, Łupaszka discovered that the Polish Home Army wanted to join the approaching Red Army and liberate Vilnius together. Though this order was given to him, he simply did not believe in the Polish-Soviet alliance. Instead of following orders, he decided to get to Central Poland and fight the Germans. History proved he was correct. Hundreds of Home Army Soldiers who helped the Soviets liberate Vilnius were either murdered or sent to Siberia by the Soviets themselves. Maneuvering between two hostile German and Soviet armies, Łupaszka and his troops arrived near Grodno, where on July 23, 1944 his brigade was formally inactivated.

THOUGH THE FIGHT ENDED FOR MANY OF HIS MEN WHEN THE BRIGADE WAS INACTIVATED, Łupaszka and some of his troops continued. After getting to the Białowieża Forest, Łupaszka decided to recreate his brigade. In spring 1945 he was promoted to the rank of major and was ready to fight with a new, but well known enemy – the Soviets. He lasted in the uneven fight until June 1948, when he was arrested by officers of the Office of Public Security. The communist court sentenced him to death eight times. Maj Zygmunt Szendzielarz did not ask for a pardon, and remained uncompromising to the end.

ZAPORA'S TIME

Hieronim Dekutowski

HE WAS TRAINED IN BRITAIN AS A "CICHOCIEMNY" (SILENT UNSEEN) commando and joined the Home Army in 1943. This is how Władysław Siła-Nowicki remembered his chief: "He quickly earned a reputation of an outstanding commander. He was brave, took quick decisions, but at the same time he was careful and felt responsible for his people. He was very well trained in using hand and machine weapons. Inconspicuous, but with great personal charm, he could be demanding, and enforced iron discipline on his subordinate troops. That, combined with moderation and care of every individual soldier, gained him profound respect among his subordinates."

HE SOON BECAME FAMOUS AS ONE OF THE MOST EFFECTIVE PARTISAN COMMANDERS IN THE LUBLIN AREA. He conducted over 80 successful operations against the Germans, but when the Soviets entered the area in 1944 and Poland fell under communist rule, Zapora and his people could no longer be happy with their victories over the nazis. Now the enemy was their own authorities.

WITH COMMUNISTS IN CONTROL OF THE GOVERNMENT, the Lublin Home Army Regional Headquarters issued orders for Zapora and his men to retaliate against the communist forces. He consolidated and reorganized his men and immediately brought the fight to the enemy. Half a year later he was promoted to the rank of major and became the commander of all forest troops in the Lublin area.

IN FALL 1945, THE FREEDOM AND INDEPENDENCE ASSOCIATION REPLACED THE HOME ARMY. Maj Dekutowski was serving as commander of forest troops and was in charge of operations against communist forces in vicinity of Lublin. His troops quickly inspired terror in the Soviet NKVD, Polish communist authorities, and the Polish Office of Public Security; just as they had in the SS or Gestapo. Using captured trucks, Zapora's partisans conquered small communist-held towns and destroyed militia stations, jails, and prisons. As Mr. Siła-Nowicki wrote: "Around 200-250 people, devoted ideologically, well-armed, trained and kept in discipline, took control of half of the Lublin region."

AS THE YEARS WENT BY, ZAPORA REALIZED THE MATTER WAS GETTING HOPELESS. After the communists had announced amnesty in February 1947, Maj Dekutowski stopped armed operations and came out of hiding in June. Due to the risk of being arrested, he made attempts to escape abroad, but was betrayed and captured by the communists in September 1947. He was brutally tortured during a six-month investigation and sentenced to death. He was executed on March 7, 1949.

Even though he was less than thirty, his soldiers used to call Hieronim Dekutowski "Stary" (Old). It was not about his looks. He was short and slim, did not look like an old veteran, but appearances tend to be deceptive. His official nickname in the ranks of the Home Army was "Zapora" (Barrier) and indeed, together with his troop, he proved to be an excellent barrier that stopped occupying forces.

PGZ
POLSKA GRUPA ZBROJENIOWA

IRON WOLF

Zdzisław Badocha

He was famous for his mad courage, daring behavior, bravado, and impeccable manners.

In the army, he had the opinion of a "soldier-gentleman." 2nd Lt Zdzisław "Żelazny" (Iron) Badocha, son of a Polish officer, died at the age of 21. Nevertheless, he managed to become a legend of the Death Brigade – a famous Home Army unit. The brigade aroused fear and terror among the Soviets and the Polish communists.

"ID!" A PALE militia station commander shouted as he jumped to his feet. He saw a young officer appear like a ghost in front of his desk. "This is my ID" Żelazny drawled, putting a Browning under the commander's nose. It was the early morning of May 19, 1946 when the legendary "Żelazny Race" began. Together with a group of soldiers, Żelazny disarmed communist militia stations and offices of Public Security. They concluded their operation soon before midnight.

SIMILARLY TO ALL OPERATIONS CONDUCTED BY ŻELAZNY AND HIS MEN, this one was also quick and effective. The scenario was the same everywhere they went – during a raid, militia officers were stripped down to their underwear, lined up with their backs to a wall, and watched piles of burning Polish-Soviet propaganda leaflets. Portraits of Stalin, Lenin, and the communist president of Poland, Bierut, were ripped off walls and trampled with boots. "Don't fight against us! Don't fight against your nation!" Żelazny demanded powerfully, looking straight into their eyes. His men disconnected telephones, collected weapons, and gathered papers while Żelazny lectured groups of militiamen. Upon their departure, Żelazny always left a note saying: "Weapons collected for the Polish Armed Forces, fighting for freedom of the Fatherland," signed by Maj Zygmunt "Łupaszka" Szendzielarz, commander of the Death Brigade. At the conclusion of such raids, it was never a surprise when militiamen volunteered to fight for Żelazny and his men.

IN ADDITION TO RAIDING MILITIA STATIONS, Home Army intelligence also provided Żelazny with the locations of traitors and NKVD informers. Żelazny's Death Brigade would capture and whip these perpetrators, either in public or in the presence of their families. After the punishment, before Żelazny and his men departed, the individuals were informed that whipping was their last warning.

THE DEATH BRIGADE ALSO TARGETED OFFICES OF PUBLIC SECURITY, an organization that struck fear in all. The fate of Public Security officials had already been decided, as leaving them alive would result in a wave of arrests among the Poles who supported the Home Army. It meant tortures and death of innocent people. "Do not hesitate! They wouldn't!" Żelazny shouted to one of his soldiers when he was too sluggish to reach for his gun. Death Brigade raids on Public Security offices were always quick, precise, and violent. Upon entry into the facility, targets were quickly identified and neutralized. Remaining enemies were put up against the wall and read the following: "Pursuant to the judgement of the Home Army Field Court, for your harmful activities towards the Polish nation and widespread distribution of Bolshevik propaganda, you are hereby sentenced to death." The enemies were summarily shot. Such scenario was repeated by Żelazny's men several times on that day.

ŻELAZNY WAS CAPTURED A YEAR LATER. An enemy force surrounded a beautiful villa in the northern Kaszuby region of Poland, where Żelazny was recovering from multiple wounds he had suffered. He tried to run, he fought single-handedly, knowing they would not take him alive. He was killed by a grenade thrown to his feet. Despite numerous attempts to find Second Lieutenant Zdzisław "Żelazny" Badocha's place of rest, it still remains unknown to this day. However, against the intention of communists,

THE SILENT UNSEEN

Perfectly trained, unconditionally dedicated, and recklessly courageous. Only such soldiers could serve in a special Polish unit formed in Britain in 1940. Their task was extremely dangerous – they were to conduct a nighttime parachute jumps into German-occupied Poland and continue the fight alongside resistance movement troops. **They were called the "Silent Unseen" and became a legend of WWII.** Their training methods were later used by commando units all over the world.

He made his jump on December 27, 1941.

Maciej Kalenkiewicz

CAPT MACIEJ KALENKIEWICZ was a man of action. As a young Polish officer, he took part in the defense of Poland in September 1939. After the defense failed, he adopted the nickname of "Kotwicz" and became a member of the incipient resistance movement. However, he quickly realized he would be of better use on the front so he decided to get to France and join the Polish troops forming there. In February 1940, together with Capt Jan Górski, he contacted the Polish leadership and presented an interesting proposal – to organize a special unit made up of volunteers selected from among soldiers, train them, and parachute them into Poland to fight against the rear of German forces. Their tasks in occupied Poland would also include organizing an anti-nazi underground, training partisans, executing sabotage operations, as well as transporting money, weapons, and orders to the resistance movement.

POLISH LEADERSHIP enthusiastically supported the idea of creating the airborne unit. Recruitment and training started almost immediately. Kotwicz launched the parachute course in October 1940 and the first soldiers were sent to occupied Poland five months later. In total, 316 Silent Unseen made their way into Poland. Almost a third did not survive the war. Nine died during flights or while jumping; 47 were murdered in Gestapo prisons or concentration camps; 44 fell in partisan fights and during the Warsaw Uprising; three poisoned themselves after they had been arrested; and six were killed during the Stalinist repression after the war.

NOT ONLY WAS CAPT KALENKIEWICZ the initiator of creating such a unit, but a few months after the training had started he made his way to occupied Poland himself to fight together with the Home Army. He made his jump on December 27, 1941. He was supposed to land in Poland together with five other Silent Unseen to support actions of the Polish resistance. Unfortunately, due to a navigation error, they jumped too early and landed on the territory of the Third Reich, close to the border with Poland. Before they realized where they were, they were arrested by the German Border Guard and taken to a police station for interrogation. As the Poles had been trained for such situations, they reacted quickly. They eliminated German guards and made a run for Poland. During the fight, Kotwicz was wounded in the arm, but he managed to get his unit across the border. Before New Year's they reached Warsaw and Kalankiewicz received a high position within the Polish resistance movement. For successfully getting his unit into Poland, General Stefan "Grot" Rowecki, the Home Army commander, awarded him the Virtuti Militari and promoted him to major.

PGZ
POLSKA GRUPA ZBROJENIOWA

THE LAST POLISH PARTISAN

Józef Franczak

From his hiding-place, Józef Franczak could perfectly see a group of policemen who tightly cordoned off the surrounding buildings. He knew he had no chance to flee the communists and instead decided to stake everything on one card. He simply came out and walked towards the policemen pretending he was one of the local residents. Unfortunately, the trick did not work. They opened fire and Franczak fell. This is how the last Polish partisan died in 1963, 18 years after the end of WWII.

THE BATTLE ROUTE OF JÓZEF FRANCZAK was typical for his peers from Eastern Poland. He volunteered for the army and started his service in the Military Police before the war broke out. His unit was stationed in Równe, a small town now located in Ukraine. When the Soviet Union invaded Poland on September 17, 1939, soldiers like him had to fight against the powerful enemy, bound to lose. He was taken prisoner by the Soviets, but managed to escape. As it later turned out, it was not his last successful escape.

HE RETURNED TO HIS HOME and joined partisan troops. He fought the Germans until 1944, and lived to see the liberation of Eastern Poland by the Red Army. When the new communist leadership announced conscription and organized an army to continue fighting German invaders, Franczak joined Polish troops that moved westwards under the command of Red Army officers.

HE DESERTED A FEW MONTHS LATER because of persecutions he had to face as a former Home Army soldier from the communist Security Service. He also witnessed executions of former Home Army partisans. It became apparent the Soviets had no interest in fighting against the nazis with the Poles. The new communist government was afraid soldiers of the independence underground, who loved their motherland and were faithful to the government-in-exile, would be an obstacle on their way to take full power in post-war Poland.

BEING A DESERTER, Franczak was blacklisted as a wanted criminal. He had no choice but to go back to conspiracy. He got involved in anti-communist activities and the underground resistance movement. He became the head of a combat unit whose task was to execute communist informers and overzealous officials of the communist Security Service. He and his people were very effective in what they did; so effective that Franczak soon became one of the most sought after individuals. However, as time passed, he had less and less hope for victory over the communist regime. His unit, constantly pressed hard by the army and police, was shrinking, until one day he was left alone. The noose around him was tightening and the operation to capture him was getting bigger and bigger. There were approximately 100 secret collaborators of the Security Service involved in the action aimed at capturing and killing him.

ON OCTOBER 21, a group of 35 policemen cordoned off farm buildings. Earlier, they had been informed that Franczak was hiding there. Knowing he had no chance to run away, he decided to leave his life to chance. He came out of his hiding place hoping he would deceive the policemen and leave the spot as an incidental witness of the operation. The police, however, quickly realized it was him and started shooting. Franczak returned fire and tried to escape, but was gunned down in the firefight.

Marian Bernaciak

TO THE LAST DROP OF BLOOD

It was 1944. Newspapers wrote about the victorious march of the Red Army to the West. Major Marian "Orlik" Bernaciak, the commander of the biggest partisan force in the Lublin area, had been fighting the Germans for five years. He understood perfectly well what the news meant to Poland. He had to prepare his troops for a new war. This time with communists who ruled his country and collaborated with Moscow.

ORLIK WAS AN EXCEPTIONALLY CHARISMATIC LEADER. This strict, disciplined officer naturally earned the respect of his men. He was considered invincible. He and his troops pressed the communists hard, and in turn, the communists hunted him like an animal. Unable to catch him, they took revenge on his parents and brother, who were captured and tortured in prison.

POLISH HOME ARMY SOLDIERS WERE TARGETED THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY, being the only ones that could prevent Poland from falling under total Soviet control. Prisons were full of Polish resistance movement members and those who dared to oppose the authorities. In 1945, Orlik decided to carry out a daring operation and free prisoners from a prison in Puławy.

A STUDEBAKER TRUCK SUDDENLY STOPPED IN FRONT OF THE PRISON BUILDING, raising clouds of dust. Orlik, in a Soviet Major's uniform, jumped out of the truck and shouted in Russian: "Open up! We've brought Polish bandits from the forest!" His firm voice made the guards open the gate and a column of escorted "prisoners" entered the building. Unfortunately, on their way through the corridors, an NKVD officer discovered the hoax and reached for his gun. Orlik was faster and did not miss. The initial shots turned into an all-out firefight. "That's for our murdered brothers!" shouted Orlik's troops and fired at the security police workers, who did not stand a chance against their guns.

MARIAN "ORLIK" BERNACIAK

ORLIK'S SOLDIERS OPENED THE CELLS TO FREE THE PRISONERS, and loaded them into trucks. Many were able to move on their own; however, some prisoners needed assistance due to broken limbs they suffered during torture sessions. With the prisoners loaded, Orlik ordered withdrawal. On their way, he and his men encountered Red Army troops coming to provide reinforcement to the attacked prison. In an effort to deceive the Russians, Orlik shouted in Russian "They are fighting with our troops down at the Puławy prison!" The Russian force rushed there to conduct their counter-attack. Orlik's soldiers liberated 107 prisoners. The Soviets could not forget the insult they had experienced. A month later they would take their revenge on the partisans.

AFTER SEVERAL DAYS OF MARCHING THROUGH THE FORESTS, fleeing partisans arrived in the village of Las Stocki. They ran into an ambush and were attacked by NKVD riflemen and armored half-tracks equipped with Browning heavy machine guns. They were taken by surprise and tried to find shelter in farm houses. The shooting continued, but the Soviets made a rookie mistake – they came too close. After the first shock, the Poles pulled together, counterattacked and successfully broke the enemy's ranks. Orlik, leading a patrol team, stumbled upon NKVD command, but he did not lose his cool. He was wearing a dusty combat uniform that looked a lot like the Security Office uniform, so he boldly shouted "Password!" – "Leningrad!" he heard them shout back, and that was the last word uttered by them on this earth. Orlik's boys' guns sang their song and their grenades silenced the weapons on enemy vehicles. Taking advantage of the smoke and confusion, small groups of Polish partisans ultimately demolished Soviet troops with machine guns and bayonets. That was the biggest battle waged between the Home Army and NKVD.

ORLIK'S RUN OF LUCK LASTED UNTIL JULY 1946. Hunted down, surrounded, Orlik fought just as he swore – to the last drop of blood.

7 ALLIES IN NATO

PGZ
POLSKA GRUPA ZBROJENIOWA

ROSKO18

ILL. RAFAŁ ROSKOWIŃSKI

7 ALLIES IN NATO

Poland joined NATO in 1999. This event truly started a new era in Polish history. Since then, Poland, and Polish soldiers, have proved time and time again they are a valuable, reliable ally. The NATO principle "One for all, all for one" became a motto for the Polish Armed Forces. Poland's presence in the Alliance has never been questioned and is one of the pillars of the country's security.

HISTORIA POLSKA ZBROJNA

The deal made by the great powers after WWII, the Yalta agreement, sentenced Poland to time in the Communist Bloc. The agreement divided Europe into two parts – democratic and communist, and this division lasted until 1989. Throughout the Cold War, the Poles tried to escape Soviet supremacy, but numerous attempts ended with bloody suppression. The Red Army troops stationed in Poland ensured the status quo was maintained. Polish leaders were communists supported by Moscow and only economic and political crisis in the Soviet Union provided opportunity for a democratic revolution.

The "Solidarity" movement that occurred within Poland in 1980 triggered changes within the entire Eastern Bloc. These changes finally came to fruition with the fall of the Berlin Wall. The communist regime became brittle and holes appeared in the Iron Curtain that had divided Europe for half a century. In 1989, Poland had its first non-communist government since WWII ended. Citizens of other countries in Eastern Europe – Czechs, Hungarians, Romanians, Bulgarians, East Germans – all followed the Polish example. They overthrew communist governments and started democracies. The Soviet Union plunged further into crisis and was no longer able to stop this process.

Regaining independence also effected the organization of Poland's armed forces.

In early 1991, Poland was still a member of the Warsaw Pact, with 50,000 Soviet troops stationing within Poland's borders. Only after closing those two issues could the Polish Army start reforming. Soviet troops started withdrawing in April 1991 and three months later the Warsaw Pact was dissolved. The last Soviet soldier left Poland on September 17, 1993. The date was symbolic, as on this particular day in 1939 Soviet Union invaded Poland and in collaboration with the Third Reich partitioned the country.

ANTEROOM TO NATO

Joining NATO was an obvious decision for Poland. After half a century of dependence on the Soviet Union, the Alliance appeared as a real guarantor of security and independence. A good intro to negotiations was the success of a still a little mysterious Operation Simoom in 1990. The Poles were the only volunteers to conduct this risky operation, and succesfully withdrew from Iraqi hell the "burnt" American operatives. In October 1993, NATO invited young democracies from Central and Eastern Europe to join the Partnership for Peace. It was meant to be an introduction to full membership, the time when enemies of yesterday were to get to know one other, specify frameworks of future cooperation and begin collective operations. In spring 1994 Poland participated in NATO's "Cooperative Bridge" exercise. For five days, the Polish Army trained with 900 troops from 13 NATO and partner nations.

AFTER A FEW YEARS OF COOPERATION WITHIN THE PARTNERSHIP FOR PEACE, THE DREAM OF THE POLES CAME TRUE – POLAND BECAME A FULL MEMBER OF NATO.

It was a turning point in the history of the Polish Armed Forces and as many as 500 journalists from all over the world observed the training. Soon after, Polish soldiers left for their first mission under the NATO flag. A Polish Army battalion took part in operations within Bosnia and supervised implementation of peace treaties after the war in the former Yugoslavia. Even though Russia firmly opposed increased NATO membership, the door was open and nothing could stop Poland on its journey to full membership.

THE POLES ARE RELIABLE ALLIES

After a few years of cooperation within the Partnership for Peace, the dream of the Poles came true – Poland became a full member of NATO. On March 12, 1999 accession protocols were signed in an American town with a symbolic name - Independence. On that very day Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary joined NATO as the first countries of the former Communist Bloc.

In 2019 we will celebrate the 20th anniversary of Poland's NATO membership. Throughout all those years, Poland has proved to be a valuable Ally who thoroughly understands the provisions of the North Atlantic Treaty. The Polish Armed Forces underwent deep transformation and adjusted themselves to cooperate with new Allies. Any time the international community discussed military intervention, Polish soldiers were always one of the first that were ready to act. Recent examples include Poland's participation in Iraq and Afghanistan. Additionally, soldiers bearing the white and red flag on their uniforms guard peace in Kosovo; our navy patrols the Mediterranean; pilots defend the sky over Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia within the NATO Baltic Air Policing operation.

Poland also supported the United States after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. It was the first and the only time NATO employed the collective defense procedure. Polish soldiers for many years fought the Taliban within the international Operation Enduring Freedom and later within the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). Now Polish forces are a part of the Resolute Support mission helping Afghan National Security Forces build capabilities to enable Afghans to take control over their country's security. At its peak, the Polish contingent in Afghanistan consisted of over 2,500 troops, and in total over 28,000 Poles have been deployed there; 44 of them made the ultimate sacrifice. "I have been privileged to command coalition efforts in Iraq and in Afghanistan. In each case, the Polish forces were crucial members of the coalition and demonstrated impressive courage, professional expertise, and commitment. In each mission, I spent a lot of time with the Polish forces, and I highly value the contribution of our Polish partners" – this is how General David Petraeus, the then commander of US troops in Afghanistan, assessed cooperation with Polish soldiers.

Countries of Central and Eastern Europe were especially threatened by the imperial policy of Russia.

ARM IN ARM ON NATO'S EASTERN FLANK

After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, it seemed Europe would become free from the threat of war. With the ever-changing operational environment, the model of cooperation within the Alliance evolved towards dealing with threats other than classic war. International terrorism, Islamic fundamentalists, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, asymmetric conflict, and conflicts in cyberspace became focal points for NATO. Unfortunately, reality turned out to be different than expected. The war against Georgia in 2008, Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea, and other aggressive actions showed Russia still considered using military force as a tool to conduct its foreign policy. Moscow's aggressive approach made NATO change its priorities and return to its roots – to collective efense of its own territory. Countries of Central and Eastern Europe were especially threatened by the imperial policy of Russia. They initiated efforts to increase security of NATO's Eastern Flank. A number of decisions were taken during the Newport Summit to respond to Russia's aggression. As a result, the NATO Response Force was reformed and expanded, and member states agreed to increase their spending on defense to at least 2% of GDP in order to restore combat capabilities of their armed forces.

The most important step the countries of Central and Eastern Europe had been waiting for was made during the 2016 Warsaw NATO Summit. NATO decided to send troops to the Eastern Flank. Within the Enhanced Forward Presence initiative, international battalion combat groups were sent to Poland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. The US also deployed additional units. It was meant to be a clear message to Russia that any violation of NATO member states would mean entering into a conflict with the whole coalition. Contrary to what Russian propaganda claimed, provisions of the Treaty were more than just paper declarations. In case of a crisis, the states of Central and Eastern Europe could count on their partners. Poland also highlighteits commitment to the Alliance and sent soldiers to Latvia and Romania where they continue to serve.

PGZ
POLSKA GRUPA ZBROJENIOWA

A SAPPER WHO SAVED A CHILD

Filip Marciniak

PGZ
POLSKA GRUPA ZBROJENIOWA

Ambush! When the first shot rang out, the soldiers immediately executed the battle drill they had practiced hundreds of times. Their response was muscle memory. However, this time there was something different – they spotted a little Afghan boy on the side of the road. He stood there frightened to death, unable to make a step. **Polish Army Private 1st Class Filip Marciniak jumped from behind cover and rushed towards the boy.** In a split second he reached him, scooped him up, and protected him from the ensuing fight.

Filip Marciniak

IT WAS MEANT to be another routine patrol. Private 1st Class Filip Marciniak, an experienced sapper from the 2nd Mazovian Engineering Regiment, got into a wheeled armored vehicle with the rest of his team. They set off into the wilderness of Afghanistan on a blistering hot day. Their convoy moved slowly as the sappers searched the area for IEDs. The vehicles stopped every now and again and sappers checked suspicious looking spots – freshly dug ground, piles of stones, or heaps of garbage.

THE TALIBAN usually made IEDs out of homemade explosive (HME), often consisting of fertilizer; however, they also used mines dug out of the ground left behind by the Soviets from their war in Afghanistan. They modified the mines and continuously increased their blast range. The charge could contain 250 grams of TNT, which is enough to destroy a car. IEDs were often victim operated and sometimes equipped with anti-tamper devices to prevent deactivation. They were a lethal trap. Many Polish sappers lost their lives to such devices in Afghanistan. Their job in this country was extremely dangerous, but very important, and had to be done.

ON THAT SUNNY DAY in 2013, the patrol was approaching a village. As the vehicle stopped, Private Marciniak dismounted to check whether the road was clear and the vehicle slowly followed him. He was very careful with every step he took. If he missed anything, the resulting explosion could kill him and the rest of his team. This time everything seemed to be fine and the road was clear. Unfortunately, the danger was lurking elsewhere.

SUDDENLY, shots rang out as the Taliban initiated an ambush on the Polish patrol from multiple directions. As the patrol took cover and returned fire, Marciniak saw a little Afghan boy on the side of the road. The kid was terrified and frozen with fear. Under fire, Marciniak rushed towards the boy and took him to safety.

SOON, the story from the patrol began to spread and reached social media, where it was shared by many people. “We have plenty of good soldiers, and we also have loyal and reliable Allies,” an American soldier wrote on Facebook, commenting on the event. Marciniak’s actions saved the life of the young boy and gained him the respect of fellow soldiers, who even long after the event would greet him with: “Congratulations, brother!”

The Taliban initiated an ambush on the Polish patrol from multiple directions.

PGZ
POLSKA GRUPA ZBROJENIOWA

Ryszard Kukliński THE FIRST POLISH OFFICER IN NATO

Colonel Ryszard Kukliński, went down in history as "Jack Strong," a CIA agent behind the Iron Curtain.

"DEAR SER, I am sorry for my English. I am an forigen MAF from communistische kantry. I want to met (secretly) with U.S. Army officer. I have no many time" – such a letter surprised employees of the American Embassy in Bonn, Germany. What was it, Soviet KGB provocation? In fact this was the beginning of one of the most important spy operations of the Cold War. The author of the letter, Polish Army Colonel Ryszard Kukliński, went down in history as "Jack Strong," a CIA agent behind the Iron Curtain.

RYSZARD KUKLIŃSKI WAS A TALENTED AND INTELLIGENT OFFICER. In communist Poland, he quickly moved up the career ladder and his superiors saw him as an excellent planner and staff officer. In 1963 he became a member of the Polish Army's General Staff where he planned large military operations alongside the Red Army in preparation of the Polish forces for the outbreak of a potential WWIII. He had access to the most classified documents regarding not only Poland, but the entire Warsaw Pact.

AS HE REMEMBERED YEARS LATER, it was his analysis of the Warsaw Pact's operational plans that made him cooperate with the US intelligence. According to Soviet strategists, if WWIII broke out, the Polish Army's task was to invade northern Germany, Denmark, and the Netherlands. They were to face a well prepared enemy and would suffer great loses. Bluntly put, the Poles were to become cannon-fodder. To make matters worse, Soviets expected that if NATO decided to stop the offensive and use nukes, they would hit Poland. Such a strike would destroy it. Expected losses were to reach even 28 million Poles, almost 90% of the country's population.

KUKLIŃSKI DECIDED TO INFORM the Americans in order to prevent such a tragic disaster. He sent a letter to the American Embassy in Western Germany while visiting the country and proposed a meeting. The meeting, which ultimately took place, began his cooperation with the CIA, which nicknamed him "Jack Strong." Kukliński handed over almost 40,000 pages of classified military documents to the American ntelligence over a nine-year period. They included information on how Warsaw Pact armies would launch attacks on Western Europe, Soviet plans to use nukes, and technical specifications of the latest Soviet military hardware. Throughout this time, Kukliński never received a penny from the CIA; rather, he was motivated by doing the right thing.

AMERICANS SAY KUKLIŃSKI was one of the most important agents in the Eastern Bloc. "No one in the world within the last 40 years did more harm to communism than this Pole. He helped keep the peace," said William Casey, a former CIA Director. Unfortunately, Col Kukliński paid a high price for his activities. In 1981, facing imminent danger of being denunciated, he had to flee to the USA together with his family. In communist Poland he was degraded, charged with betrayal, and sentenced to death. A few years later, both of Kukliński's sons died in mysterious circumstances. Many believe it was the Soviet revenge.

WHEN POLAND WAS FREED from the shackles of communism, the country revoked Kukliński's sentence and he was cleared of all charges. He died in 2004, and was posthumously promoted to Brigadier General in 2014.

PGZ
POLSKA GRUPA ZBROJENIOWA

"WELL DONE!"

THE TEAM SPENT THE FOLLOWING HOURS CAREFULLY SEARCHING THE GIANT PLATFORM.

EVERYTHING WAS READY. At dawn, forces of the international coalition were to start the second invasion of Iraq and strike the final blow to Saddam Hussein's regime.

POLISH COMMANDOS OF THE GROM MILITARY UNIT had been operating in the Persian Gulf for quite a while and had been training with US Navy SEALs. The operations GROM conducted in the Persian Gulf are still classified; however, they must have impressed their American colleagues as they were tasked with taking over the Umm Qasr oil platform. This platform served as key terrain because it guarded the port which was to serve as a logistic junction through which coalition troops and supplies would pass in support of the invasion. Securing this platform, and this important line of communication, was key to the success of the coalition's operation.

ON THE NIGHT before the war broke out, Polish commandos set off in their boats towards the platform. They were moving slowly and quietly not to attract attention of Iraqis guarding the area. Yard after yard they were aproaching the giant metal installation. The fact that it was supposed to be the first battle of Polish soldiers since the end of WWII added extra emotion. "Was I afraid? Yes. But my fear is very different from the fear of an ordinary individual. It sharpens senses. I see and hear much better. Fear helps me, and it helped me then, too," recalls Col Andrzej "Wodzu" Kruczyński, the operation commander.

WHEN THEY FINALLY REACHED THE PLATFORM, they had to climb four stories with over 50 kg of equipment – weapons, heavy hammers and saws for cutting metal. The installation was like a labyrinth full of nooks, crannies, and dead ends. Iraqi soldiers could be hiding anywhere. The Poles had been warned that Iraqis might have attack dogs with them and the installation itself was full of sharp obstacles emplaced to delay an attacking force. They had to watch their every step.

MASKED POLISH SOLDIERS entered the platform unnoticed. The first part of the operation was complete. As the team advanced inside the lodging area of the platform, they came across surprised Iraqi soldiers who surrendered voluntarily. Other Iraqis were in the engine room where they pretended to be civilian employees, but clean hands gave them away. The platform was seized in several minutes.

THE TEAM spent the following hours carefully searching the giant platform. The soldiers had to enter and clear all rooms, many of which were secured with large, steel doors. They used saws, cutting discs, and shotguns to enter various types of rooms. When all cutting discs, saw blades, and shotgun ammunition ran out, they had to use crowbars and equipment scavenged from around the platform to open the last door.

SEIZING, CLEARING, AND SEARCHING the platform took less than seven hours and ended successfully. The world soon found out about its result. Poland, which at this time had only been a NATO member for four years, proved it was a trustworthy Ally. Later Donald Rumsfeld, the then US Secretary of Defense, publicly thanked the Poles and summarized their operation with brief "Well done."

NO ONE LEFT BEHIND

Tomasz Borowski

Thanks to the soldiers' bravery, focus, and knowledge of medical procedures, the pilots of the helicopter were evacuated and transported to the doctors who provided further help and treatment.

IT WAS A BITTERLY COLD FRIDAY morning at the Polish base in Ghazni, Afghanistan. Snow and freezing temperatures made Polish soldiers' life hard, but nothing could be done about it. After all it was already November, and winters in Afghanistan can be very severe. Sgt Tomasz Borowski, a soldier of the Tactical Combat Team of the 14th Rotation of the Polish Military Contingent Afghanistan, was engaged in routine daily activities. He never expected this cold morning would turn into a very hot one in an instant...

IT WAS SGT TOMASZ BOROWSKI'S second mission. He was already an experienced soldier – he had joined the army in 2002 as a conscript. When his mandatory military service ended, he decided to stay. He was a gunner and a commander of a Leopard 2A4 tank in the 10th Armored Cavalry Brigade. He had extensive field training and experience, but Afghanistan would nevertheless surprise him. This time not with IED explosions or Taliban ambushes. The situation where Borowski found himself was nothing he could prepare for.

IT WAS NOVEMBER 22, 2013. A loud thud suddenly stopped routine activities conducted at the Polish base in Afghanistan and a cloud of thick black smoke rose into the air. To everyone's horror, an inbound US helicopter had crashed nearby. Sgt Tomasz Borowski and his subordinates thought of only one thing – that there were people inside the wreck. Disregarding their own safety, they rushed to rescue those inside, following the most important principle of every soldier – leave no one behind. They reached the wreck and recovered two US soldiers. "Let's get them somewhere safe," Borowski shouted. His soldiers provided first aid and decided to transport the injured to the field hospital. Only thanks to their bravery, focus, and knowledge of medical procedures, the pilots of the helicopter were evacuated and transported to the doctors who provided further help and treatment.

A FEW WEEKS after these events, on January 9, 2014, Sgt Tomasz Borowski was asked to step forward during an assembly. Brigadier General Cezary Podlasiński, Commander of the 14th Rotation of the Polish Contingent Afghanistan, awarded Borowski with a commemorative coin from General James C. McConville, commander of Regional Command East in Afghanistan. For Sgt Borowski it was obvious he was not the only one who deserved the award. "It's a great honor for me, but I must highlight I wasn't there alone," he said. "Indeed, I was the first to arrive on the spot, but my soldiers immediately joined me. It was team work." He was also presented with "Hero of the Battle," an award given to those who demonstrate remarkable courage on the battlefield. "I am a soldier, and I did what I was supposed to do," said Borowski after receiving the award.

THEY RUSHED TO RESCUE THOSE INSIDE

The pilots of the helicopter were evacuated and transported to the doctors

BLACK HAWK DOWN

LET'S GET THEM SOMEWHERE SAFE

POLAND'S FIRST HERO OF THE BATTLE

He knew an ordinary, boring job was not for him.

Quietly, as he didn't like to disapoint his family, he said he did not want to be a driver like his father. He wanted challenges, adrenaline, adventure. Sgt Szymon "Sitar" Sitarczuk was a brave sapper who risked his own life to protect his colleagues. He was also the first Pole whom Americans awarded with the "Hero of the Battle" title. Unfortunately, he did not get a chance to accept it in person – he died in Afghanistan in an IED explosion.

THERE ARE ALWAYS FRESH FLOWERS AND CANDLES burning on Szymon's grave in his hometown. He had many close friends, but also people from across the globe still remember him seven years after his death. "A great friend, humble, and willing to give the shirt off his back, he was always there to assist. He was just a reliable guy," they say.

IN AFGHANISTAN HE WAS LIKE THIS TOO – a reliable soldier. He became a sapper, because he thought it was an interesting job. He fulfilled himself through this job, and his colleagues used to say that "When Sitar checked the road, you could feel safe." He was naturally drawn to dangerous operations and always had a chance to prove himself. During one operation he found a box with 22 mortar shells hidden by terrorists.

HE IMPRESSED HIS SUPERIORS AGAIN when his Polish patrol was attacked in Afghanistan and he was struck by an enemy bullet. Despite his injury, he continued to scan and clear the area. He discovered and deactivated an IED, the explosion of which could kill other soldiers. "Brave guy" – others complimented him. He was presented with the "Hero of the Battle" award by Americans. That was something! The first Pole with such a distinctive award! Americans very rarely award it to soldiers from other countries – as one of his fellows remarks.

UNFORTUNATELY, Szymon did not manage to personally accept it. He died on August 18, 2011. On that day, he was on patrol with soldiers from Alfa Battle Group, 1st Motorized Company. They stopped insurgents planting an IED. They were on their way back when they decided to check one more suspicious looking area nearby. As they moved to investigate, a mine exploded underneath Szymon, killing him instantly.

SZYMON SITARCZUK IS STILL REMEMBERED, especially by the sappers of the 1st Sapper Regiment in Brzeg, where he served, and by soldiers of the 7th Wielkopolska Horse Riflemen Battalion in Wędrzyn with whom he was deployed to Afghanistan. Even his old school teachers talk about him. In 2013 his parents recalled: "It was his decision to become a soldier and his desire to go to the mission. A couple of weeks before he died, he called and said he would like to go again with another rotation. Why should we blame anyone? It was his choice, and we only wish his service had not ended like it did."

CITY HALL DEFENSE

All-embracing fear on one side, and a great will to fight on the other. In April 2004, Captain Grzegorz Kaliciak commanded a group of Polish and Bulgarian troops who defended the Karbala City Hall against insurgents. They won the battle and suffered no losses.

Grzegorz Kaliciak

THE OPERATION started on April 3, 2004, during the Ashura. Millions of Shia Muslims arrived in the holy city of Karbala and it was expected there would be insurgents among the pilgrims. A once peaceful city, tensions in Karbala grew. Riots started, explosions could be heard, terrorists deliberately drove buses into crowds of people, and suicide attackers detonated themselves in the most crowded places. Polish rapid reaction forces were deployed with the task to defend City Hall at all costs.

SEVERAL DOZEN POLISH AND BULGARIAN TROOPS found themselves in the two-story building that was the seat of a number of local offices and a police station. Capt Kaliciak tasked the Bulgarian troops to defend the ground floor and the Poles to defend everything above. Soldiers blocked the entrance to the building with armored vehicles and installed machine guns in every window. Some troops were sent to the roof to observe the surroundings of City Hall. The air was thick with the odor of sewage and the troops could hear the barking of stray dogs. After midnight, on April 4, the insurgents launched their attack. Capt Kaliciak's men effectively halted the enemy; however, they expended massive amounts of ammunition. Amazingly, several Polish soldiers and a nurse mounted light, unarmored tactical vehicles and made their way through the streets full of armed insurgents to secure and resupply the men with ammunition.

THE REBELS attacked City Hall only after dusk and the following nights brought further attacks. Frightened residents fled and the insurgents captured buildings adjacent to City Hall. Terrorists, hidden in the darkness, were shooting from roofs and windows. Soldiers managed to make extra shooting holes in the thin walls of the City Hall building, taking the enemy by surprise, as the holes were hardly visible. Exchanges of fire would last for several minutes, followed by a break and another round of shooting. "For us it was like eternity," recall the defenders. However, they continued to keep the enemy at bay.

ON THE NIGHT of April 4/5, more than 80 insurgents were killed during another assault, without any losses on the side of the defenders. Every time the enemy attacked, they would suffer more losses. Nevertheless, they carried out three more attacks. Capt Kaliciak's men were winning, but they were exhausted after three days of fighting. The commander tried to boost their morale by talking about a helicopter that would soon evacuate them, or the imminent end of the battle.
On the fourth day of nearly constant combat, relief finally arrived. The 18th Bielsko Airborne Battalion joined the fight and the battle was over. The defeated insurgents withdrew.

More than 80 insurgents were killed during an assault, without any losses on the side of the defenders.

TO HELP AFRICA

A dog of war, a Polish officer who went to Africa and became a French Foreign Legion legend because he could not fight communists in his country.

Rafał Gan-Ganowicz

IN AFRICA GAN-GANOWICZ became a leader for people like him, who came from different parts of Europe and the world and risked their lives to stop the red wave that started to flow into the African Continent. Gan-Ganowicz was a kid of Warsaw whose mother was killed by nazis and father was arrested by the Soviet regime. Orphaned, he decided to join the anti-communist movement. As he ran a huge risk of being arrested, he decided to leave Poland. He did this illegally, hidden under the chassis of a train going to West Berlin. Several months later he travelled from Berlin to France.

SIX SUNTANNED MEN, French Foreign Legion officers, are sipping whisky in the "Le Fouquet's" restaurant at Champs-Elysées in Paris. The place is full of cigar smoke. The men stare blankly out into the street. Even though the music in the restaurant is quite loud, they are speaking in low voices. Another guy joins the table but after a short conversation he leaves, evidently disturbed, while the others order another round of whisky. They have just turned down an opportunity to make good money and serve under none other than Fidel Castro, whose intelligence officer tried to recruit them. They were to support the red revolution in Bolivia, receive promotions, and make more money than they ever dreamed of. For these noble men, however, a proposal to follow in Che Guevara's footsteps was like a slap in the face. They did not sell out to anyone, and besides, they had already fallen in love with Africa. The hand of fate had thrown them there before and this was where they wanted to return to. They had already experienced fights in the capital of Congo, Stanleyville, where communist intelligence instigated local residents to loot the houses of the white minority, and later gave them guns to kill its members. The bloodshed did not spare women or children. Moise Tshombe, the Prime Minister of Congo, in cooperation with the Belgian government, brought legionnaires, whose task was to stop this wave of crime and ensure security for thousands of natives who were forced to leave their homes. Africa ran with blood, and thousands of recruited Congolese camped in forests where next to the communist doctrine they were also generously fed with hashish and sent to fratricidal fights with forces loyal to the Congolese government supported by the Legion soldiers. Even though the situation was tense, the New Year's Eve in 1965 seemed peaceful. Gan-Ganowicz sent some of his soldiers to the city, and the rest treated themselves with alcohol and wanted to welcome the New Year in good mood.

THE SOLDIERS who were on duty had a brilliant idea to organize a firework display, and as they did not have any real fireworks, they decided to use mortar illumination rounds and colorful rocket flares. It was to be a show this part of Congo had never seen before! The flares went up in the air one after another and as they exploded, they lit up the night. The effect was amazing, but falling, the flares also lit up the wall of the jungle and suddenly the soldiers saw a crowd of rebels getting ready to attack. The legionnaires were taken aback, but immediately sobered up, reached for their machine guns and counterattacked. The fight was fierce, but as the soldiers were better organized and trained, an hour later the defeated rebels fled, leaving behind only the dead and the injured. Such scenario never repeated – no one dared to attack the legionnaires again.

A legionnaire's HAT

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SERVICE

Maciej Chilczuk
Supervising Editor

“Poland has not yet perished, so long as we still live”
– these are the first verses of the Polish national anthem. The words, so important for every Pole, clearly show that each of us is equally responsible for our country, and that prosperity of Poland depends on the attitude of its every citizen.

Throughout most of the 20th century, the Poles could not enjoy a truly free Motherland – they had to go through partitions, German occupation during WWII, and later the communist rule. However, they never stopped believing they would live to see their country fully independent. They kept on fighting, confident that finally they would win. This sentence also presents the idea, so important to our ancestors, that Poland is wherever the Poles are, wherever people speak, think or feel Polish. The heroes, whose stories we are telling, fought for free Poland on all fronts of all wars, very often far from their homeland. Wherever they were, their beloved Motherland was always in their hearts.

The lyrics of our national anthem say: “What the foreign force has taken from us, we shall with sabre retrieve.” These words perfectly describe the history of the Poles in the 20th century. When we look closer at what happened on the Polish territory during that century, we will see that the fight for our well-being, for our home, a place to live where no one from the outside world would interfere, was our ancestors’ destiny. First, they stood up against the agreement of the three invaders – Austria, Russia and Prussia, who kept Poland under the yoke of bondage for 123 years. When the conflict among them gave the Poles an opportunity to regain independence at the end of WWI, a bloody war with the Soviet Bolsheviks started. Around 20 years later, the country was invaded again and became a victim of the most terrifying alliance in the history of the world – the agreement between two totalitarian regimes. The fight against nazism and communism that claimed lives of millions of Poles left its mark on our history for many years. When the world was enjoying the peace and was building its new, democratic future, Poland was doomed to stay in the Communist Bloc. However, the Poles again managed to throw off the shackles that held them. None of those victories were given to the Poles on a plate. We paid a huge price for each of them.

The collection you have in your hands is a tribute to all those who – without hesitation, but with courage and faith – fought in the name of the highest values: peace, freedom and solidarity. We decided to present the experiences of the Poles and Poland in the 20th century through the stories of “ordinary--extraordinary soldiers.”

Soldiers who defend Polish borders today and guard NATO’s values and ideals are the heirs of the above-mentioned tradition. Like their ancestors – the insurgents from Wielkopolska, vanquishers of the Bolsheviks, defenders of September 1939, or members of the anti-communist movement – they are aware that what you fight for is of key importance. We do hope that once you read the stories collected here, you will be fully convinced that the Polish Army soldier with whom you serve hand in hand on the Eastern Flank is the best ally you could ever have. That he is a reliable partner, strong in history, and aware of his ancestors’ achievements. Your presence in Poland proves that we are not alone and that we have friends who will extend a helping hand in case of crisis. We count on you, and hope you will defend the highest values, just like the Poles have done so many times in history. Thank you for your service! God bless you!

20 LAT POLSKI W NATO /
20 YEARS OF POLAND IN NATO

WYDANIE SPECJALNE /
SPECIAL EDITION

PGZ

MUZEUM
BRONI PANCERNEJ
W POZNANIU

Wojskowe Zakłady Motoryzacyjne are a part of Polska Grupa Zbrojeniowa. Since their establishment in 1945, the Works have operated continuously in the arms industry. Military Automotive Works are the only Polish company authorized to repair Leopard 2 tanks owned by the Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland. The company's major areas of activity include production, modernization and servicing of tanks and wheeled armoured vehicles coupled with design and production of quick-change propulsion machinery for military vehicles.

The knowledge and experience accumulated for decades allows the Military Automotive Works specialists to closely cooperate with the Armoured Warfare Museum in Poznań. It owes exceptional exhibits to their love of the history of militaria. The restored beauty of vehicles which used to fight for Poland's freedom is a source of joy, especially on the 100th anniversary of the Greater Poland uprising and Poland's regained independence.

WOJSKOWE ZAKŁADY MOTORYZACYJNE S.A.

KATYŃ MEMORIAL

Jersey City, USA

On September 12, 2004 the ceremony of unveiling a plaque on the front side of the pediment with the image of Mother of God to honor the killed in 9/11 attacks took place. The inscription says:

NEVER FORGET! PRAY FOR THE INNOCENT
VICTIMS AND HEROES WHO DIED IN
THE TERRORIST ATTACK ON AMERICA,
SEPTEMBER 2001.

PGZ
POLISH ARMAMENTS GROUP
In all things
prepared
TOGETHER
We make world
a safer place
www.pgzsa.pl